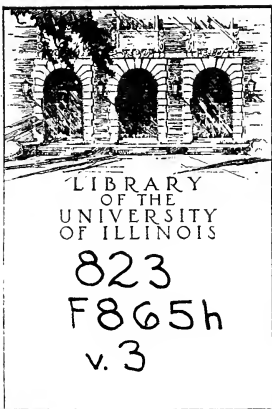


Lord Stanley of Alderley.

Book

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THE
HIGHLAND SMUGGLERS.

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "ADVENTURES OF A KUZZILBASH,"
"PERSIAN ADVENTURER," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE

HIGHLAND SMUGGLERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FORESTER'S HISTORY.

Pernicious caitiff!—double-faced villain!

“YOUR honor was but a bairn on the briest, when your worthy uncle, Captain Robert, died, and I lost as good a friend as ever wished weel to a thoughtless lad. Little did I deserve his favour, that's sure; although, may be, if every one had their due, I might na hae just had so muckle blame as cam' to my share in that Irish business.

“Most broken-hearted was the good ould Glenvallich at the death of my dear master; and sure eneugh, it was more for his sake than on my own account, that he gave me the bit croft an' grazing o' Knock-Finzie, in Glen Struan, at little more than half its ould rent, an' a charge o' the hill o' Luanish. An' weel might I have thriven on

the place, an' happy might I hae been in that bonnie glen, if it had pleased the Lord to gie me sense to guide mysel', an' to ken the ill gate from the good.

“The favour o' the landlord, and the kindness o' my neighbours, wi' some little savings from the bounty o' my late good master, enabled me to stock the farm; an' a good crop the first year, an' a lucky rise in the price o' baists put me weel aforehan'; an' I thocht like a fool, that nothing cud ever go wrong wi'me again. It was while my spirits were high, and my heart warm wi' this success, that I chanced to meet wi' one that's now gone to her place.—Oh!” said he, covering his face convulsively with his hands, while his deep voice faltered with emotion—“she was like an angel; an' then she was as good and innocent as one. O if it had but pleased the Lord to bestow that blessing on me, how different a man wud my father's son have been!—but His will be done! Weel; May Macivor was the daughter o' Ewen Macivor, the tacksman o' a comfortable farm on a neighbouring estate; a man whom all his neighbours supposed to be prosperous an' rich, for he brought up his family in a fashion above their rank: an' lucky it was thought would that man be who cud win favor o' May Macivor, for not only would he gain the bonniest lass in that or the three neighbouring glens, but a good lump o' goold an' plenishing to begin the world wi'.

“ There was a wedding in Glen Orra, no’ far from us, and there did I meet wi’ May Macivor, whom I had not seen for years—no’ since she was a wee bit lassie, paidling wi’ me in the burn an’ pulling rashes to mak’ crowns an’ swords wi’, for her youngest brother. She was noo a weel-grown young woman, tall, slender, an’ O ! far more beautiful than I can tell. We soon becam’ acquaint again : we spoke o’ ould stories, an’ May wud blush when I minded her o’ some o’ our bairnish pranks. But such talk soon removed all shyness between us, an’ afore we left the place we felt like ould friends.

“ I was na long o’ seeing May at her father’s house ; the ould man gae me a kind welcome, an’ afore many weeks were ow’r, the door o’ Ardnagrask was as open to me as my own. Macivor, sure enough thocht me a weel-doing lad, an’ I dinna doubt if I had ventured at this time to seek his daughter, he scarce wud hae refused me ; yet after all, who can tell ? Ewen was a high man, an’ had a proud heart, an’ thocht his dochter a match for a laird. For some months I courted May Macivor wi’ good hopes o’ success ; the neighbours all saw how matters were, an’ surely I had all their good wishes wi’ me.

“ At this time there cam’ one to the glen, who, if ever the devil walks on earth in the shape o’ man, had surely something o’ the enemy* about him, for when cam’ mischief an’ cunning like his from any

* Viz. the devil.

other quarter? Dougald Dorach, we heard, was from Argyleshire, and they said his name was Campbell, although others gave him the name o' Macraw. We called him Dorach for his black face and hair—it was na blacker than his heart. Little did any one in our glen ken o' the man, but we heard he had friends in Glen Fruach, no' far off; and he was said to hae a hantle o' property, both in beasts an' money. Aye, an' some spoke o' a veshall that traded about Glasgow an' Greenock, an' the west Highlands: little did we think what'n a like boat she was.

“Dougald was a tall, stout, han'some, weel-built chield, wi' a briest like a castle, an' a back like a sawmon, and black sparkling eyes leuking out ow'r dark red cheeks, like the sun shining through a winter cloud. His voice was loud an' deep like distant thunder, or as soft as the cooing o' the cushat, just as he pleased himsel' to mak' it; and weel cud he use it; for he had wit to mak' a body believe black was white when he liked. And ochone! what woman was there that cud resist Dougald Dorach's tongue, when he tuke in hand to please her.

“Weel; Dougald cam' amongst us, no one kent for what; but though he had a frank pleasant way wi' him, he was a high chiel too, and as he spent his money freely, nobody cared to ask his business. Sometimes he wud be away for a while, —a week, or may be two; but as he gave

out that he had dealings in Argyleshire, an' in some o' the western lochs, fouks did na wonder at that.

“ But Dougald begood after a while to speak o' settling in the country, an' there was a farm in Glen Orra, no' far from Ardnagrask, to be out o' lease in a twelvemonth, which he talked o' taking. In the meantime, as a neighbour that was to be, he was weel received by many in the country side, and particularly in the house o' Ewen Macivor. As for me, fool that I was, I was just wild after the fellow, who did not seem more than five years oulder than mysel', though the difference between us was nearer fifteen. Dougald had been in France, an' in Holland it seemed—aye, an' in America—though we could never weel mak' out what had ta'en him there; and many a strange tale would he tell us o' foreign parts. Then he kenned something o' south country farming, and though the ould fouk in the glens did na care muckle to meddle wi' new-fangled ways, it was still pleasant to hear Dougald speak about the crops o' the south, and the way of managing such great farms as we had heard of, with so few hands and small helps.

“ Wi' me these tales had more effect; and I longed to try, and to get rich by these quick ways, for I saw it was the only hope I had of gaining the good will of Macivor for his daughter's hand; and I was fain to hear all that black Dougald had to say about the matter, so that my house was like a

home to him. It was na' long 'ore he saw how things were 'atween me and May Macivor; and in trouth I tould him mysel' both the hopes I had and the fears I cud na but feel for her father's pride; and let him see how feared I was lest any other chap might step in 'ore I cud decently ask her. Dougald mocked at my fears; an' weel did I afterwards mind the deevilish girn o' a laugh he put on as he said, that I had too low an opinion of mysel'—that May Macivor cud never refuse such a lad as me: what will ye say, sir, when I tell you, that long 'ore this, the villain himsel' had begood* to court the very girl that he kent was all but trysted to the man he called his friend.

“It was soon after this that I begood to think that May was na' just the same to me as usual; that she keepit hersel' coulder and more distant like, than afore. Sweered, sweered,† was I to think that this cud be the case, for reason good I could find none. 'To speak till hersel' was more than I daured to do; but I believe the deevil himsel' put it in my head to let the matter out to him that was the cause o' it all. In truth, Dougald himsel' seeing me in trouble, wud na rest till I tould him what it was. ‘Hout man,’ said he, ‘I did na think ye was the fool to be cast down about sic a groundless fancy o' your own. May's thinking on the day that's fast coming, and she's modest a wee, no doubt; it's the way wi' a' thae lasses—or wha' kens but her head's amang ribbans an'

* Begun.

† Unwilling.

a' that fashery.' 'That can hardly be,' says I, 'when I never just asked her—an' faith I'm feared to do it just now.' 'O man, but ye're soft,' said the scoundrel, laughing in his sleeve at me all the time, 'think ye that a lass wud let you court her for a year an' a' half without making up her mind to the answer she's to gi' ye—haith, she's no such an innocent as that comes to—she kens weel what's coming, man—but ye're right—it's best to be canny—dinna be rash—let her alone awhile yet, an' a' things 'ill right themsel's.'

"Weel may ye wonder, sir, at my stupidity—and in trough, I think the villain most have put some glamour on me, or I cud never have been so blind and weak. I took his cursed advice however, as my ill-luck would hae it. Not a word did I say to May, nor to her father, for a while, but fint a fut farther did I get on with either. On the contrar', May's leuks grew coulder an' coulder, an' I thocht there was something I liked as ill in the way that her father tuke on wi' me. It was no 'onger ' Weel, Duncan, lad, how is it the day?—come ben to the fire, man; here's May thinks it long since ye was here,' an' the like; but 'Weel neighbour Maccombich, how goes the farm on?—I'm sorry I canna ask ye in, for I'm just going ow'r by to the byre, an' May's no just weel the nicht.'

"At last I could bear it no longer; 'I maun ken what's to come o' a' this, an' that 'ore another

day passes,' said I to Dougald, who was hanging about me as usual to find what ailed me, an' aye giving me his advice. 'I'll no be made a fool o' longer by maid or man, an' I'll ken May Macivor's mind afore I sleep.' I believe it was all the false villain cud do to hide his laughter, at finding me the very fool I scorned. But he was na without his fears neither, for I kenned afterwards that he went off like a shot the moment we parted, to Ard-nagrask, where he had a long word wi' Macivor. That very evening I went mysel' till the farm. I found Macivor in the house, an' sure I am that he expected me, an' had prepared what he was to say.

"I tould him how long I had loved May, and how much I wished to mak' her my wife; but that the fear o' displeasing him or her had gar'd me hould my tongue so long. 'Aye, aye lad,' said he, when I had done; 'an' so ye wud hae my May for ye're wife? I canna blame your taste sure eneugh; but it's strange neither her or me ever heard a word about it, though ye've been hanging about the door most twa years com' Martinmas, an' if ye thocht it wud na please us then, I dinna see hoo the matter's to be mended noo. I'm no saying a word against you, Duncan; ye're a pretty lad, sure eneugh, an' ye're no that ill at the plough or in the hill; but wow, man! the chiel that gets May Macivor must hae something more to trust to than one pair of hands an' a puir stockit farm. My

bairn has been weel keepit up, an' her gude man most hae a weel built steading to shelter her, no' a bit black bothy, whare she'll be smoked like a kipper—an' a weel plenished byre—aye, an' a lump o' lying siller to keep her warm in ill times—an' that's what I'm fear'd ye'll no hae this many a long day, friend Maccombich : however, try ye're han' if ye will, ye'll never be the worse o' that come what may. May be a while's hard eydant work will brush off some things ye learned in your travels, that ye might hae been as weel without, they're sayin'.

“ Whatever had been my fault or my folly, sir, it surely did na become the man with whom I had lived on good terms for so long, to taunt me wi' them when I had come to him wi' a ceevil word an' a kind heart ; an' ye'll no' wonder that pride an' anger put me most wild. What cause had he ever to complain o' me, or to throw up my misfortunes in my teeth ? But I keepit my thoughts as weel as I could to mysel' ; I just tould him, that he might yet see the day when Duncan Maccombich wud cock his bonnet wi' the best tacksman in Glen Orra, an' count stock and plenishing wi' any one in it, an' no seek his leave to marry a wife neither. I cud no' say less, for my heart was just bursting wi' vexation at the scornful treatment I had met wi'. ‘ Weel, weel, lad,’ replied Macivor, ‘ when that is the case, I dinna think there's any tenant or tacksman in the glen will hinder you from marry-

ing who ye please ; in the mean time, as ye're no' very weel pleased e'en now, good e'en to ye—I'll aye be weel pleased to see ye as a neighbour, tho' may be we canna 'gree about some matters.'

"I never kent, whether it was chance or design, sir, but so it happened, that as I went along, boiling wi' rage, who should meet me in a bonnie bit birkwood, a step west from the house, but May Macivor hersel'. The glance o' her calm blew e'e fell on my burning heart like the cool waters o' a summer spring—my rage was a' gone ; an' I stood afore her, trembling as if I had been guilty of a crime. It was her that spoke first, for I cud na say a word—my throat was as dry and hot as if I had swallowed fire. 'Weel, Duncan, it's a fine nicht this,' said she, wi' something o' a' fleering way about her ; 'eh, man, what's the matter wi' you? ye leuk as if ye had seen your own wraith, an' was running awa' from it—what's come ow'r ye, in the name o' gudeness?'

"The smartness o' her speech, so little like her ordinar'—for, O she was a quiet, douce, modest creture, sir—confounded me so much, that I stood still for awile, like a man no weel 'wakened out o' sleep—an' cud na answer. I remembered my purpose of forcing her to hear, an' gie me an answer that very nicht—but not a word could I get out. 'Weel, weel,' said she, after a moment's pause, 'I'm sorry for ye, lad—better go home an' sleep off this fit—ye'll be yersel' the morn, I'se

warrant—gude night.’ ‘Stop, May,’ I gasped out at last, as she was turning away; but I still thocht, wishing me to speak. ‘Stop, May, dear—it’s no’ at home, nor in bed that I’ll find any ease—it’s here, an’ from you, this very moment, that I most seek it, or never be at ease more. May, darling, ye’ve kent me as a child, ye’ve seen me as a man; for two years past I have striven to win your favour, and fain did I hope I had done so. O May, dear, tell me, was I right—tell me, will ye consent to be my bride and wife?’

“Even the darkness of the evening cud na hide the blush that covered May Macivor’s face, when she heard me speak out so freely, what, perhaps, she thought I wud never venture to say. She was utterly confounded, and in her surprise she sought to pass me by; but I caught hould o’ her gown an’ keepit her. ‘Let me alone, Duncan—leave me,’ said she; ‘ye weel ken that ye daur na speak this way if my father was here. Let me go, sir, I bid you.’ ‘And why should I no’ say as much before your father, May?’ said I, a little proudly, an’ lousing my hould o’ her; for what had passed between Macivor an’ mysel’ cam’ ow’r me wi’ a could feel, an’ my pride begood to rise again; ‘Have I any reason, think ye, to be ashamed afore him? or why shuld I no’ tell him, as I hae yoursel, what has been in my heart an’ my mind these two years.’ ‘An’ if it was,’ says May, ‘it was weel keepit there, for never a sough o’ it got far-

ther; an' better may be it wud hae been, if it had stayed where it was the nicht;—an' wi' that she flitted awa' in the gloaming like a spirit, leaving me confounded and speechless wi' surprise and vexation.

“Home I be to go at last, however, an' a miserable creture was I that night. I thocht o' a thousand things; but what to do at last I cud na tell. I wud throw up the farm, an' sell the stock, an' off to America—I wud try the seas—I wud 'list—but no—a' thae ways wud gie them ow'r muckle reason to crow over me, an' that I cud na stand the thocht o'. I wud work as never man worked—I wud double my stock, and crop—I wud get rich, never mind how, and then show all the country how I scorned both May and her father. My briest was like a lowing coal, an' my brain like a mill-wheel spinning round, in the morning; but up I got, an' was just going out, when the door opened, an' who should come in but Dougald Dorach.

“‘Hoo! man,’ says he, ‘an' what's the matter now? your een's like a fiery serpent's, an' ye're cheeks like a white lime wa'. Ye're surely no' weel?’ I was too vexed to speak for a while, but the airt o' Dougald soon opened my mouth an' my heart. Weel did the cunning villain ken all that had passed, an' what cause o' vexation I had; but he heard it a' as if it were news. ‘Pooff, man! an' is that a'?’ said he, ‘is a man like you to flee into

a fit at every wheem o' a dorty lassie? she'll come too, lad, no fears; an' as for the ould man, there may be means found o' smoothing him wi' the hair yet. But what was ye thinking o' doing? for surely old Macivor has heard some stories against you, an' ye most do something to win his good will. Let me see, now; if ye cud put up a better house here—it wud na cost ye muckle: the laird wud gi' you wood, and ye wud get the value o' what ye put out, if ye left the farm; an' as for a coo or two, to gar the byre leuk decent, I dinna think that wud be hard to come by neither. I ken o' some's to be sould—it's a gay bit awa'; but what then—a willing heart, ye ken, mak's a light fut; an' I'm thinking, a wee puckle siller wud do; we wud gar a bit paper serve for the rest till cash cud be had or made. Hey, lad—eh—what say ye?' Ochone, sir, what cud I say—my heart was bursting, an' my brains were just on fire—I cud na think, my judgment was clean gone from me; an' how cud I see the mischief an' villany that lay under the friendly words o' the black Dougald?

“After speaking to me awhile, and forcing me to answer, until he had begun to rouse me a little, the cunning villain began to open more o' his own mind to me, by way of winning more o' my confidence. ‘Ye say, Duncan,’ said he, ‘that there's nothing 'most ye wud na do to spite Ewen Macivor, an' win his daughter? But ye say that money's scarce; noo what if I was to show ye,

that ye have what wud go far to help ye in this straight, if ye'll be advised by me? aye, an' may be I may put ye in a way o' turning a bonnier penny than e'er ye thocht o', man.' 'Weel Dougald, man,' answered I, 'if ye do this, I'll call ye the truest friend I have, sure eneugh; but how is it to be? for it passes my skill to guess, tho' my head's bursting wi' sheer thinking.' 'Aye, a true friend, indeed, if ye kent a',' said he, wi' something queer in his face, that I did na understand; 'but whisht, man, an' hear me.' But I need na trouble your honour wi' ow'r long a tale. Dougald, it appeared, from his own mouth, had for years past been largely engaged in the distilling and smuggling trade. He was concerned wi' many o' the largest stills in Perthshire and Argyleshire, an' was thick wi' the lads o' Glen Shlichard, where then, as now, there was more good malt brewed, an' more good whisky made, than in half the glens o' the Highlands. He had friends in Glasgow, an' in every town in the firth; an' a long nebbed cutter, commanded by a smart chiel o' a captain, wi' thirty stout han's, that not only disposed o' what he cud na sell through the country, but wud whiles bring a wheen brandy, an' gin, an' lace, an' French thingimees, for the gentry o' the wast coast.

"Weel, sir, Dougald kent that I had a bonny bit croft o' barley—it was na the worse o' some o' the south country pranks I tried wi' it—and thirty

bows o' good' malting grain was just cut an' weel gathered in. He tould me, an' made it as clear as day, that if I wud but put this barley through the still, it wud be worth, nigh hand three times the selling price at the farm—a sum that wud go far to build the house an' stock the byre forby paying the laird's rent. But the ill I got from that work afore, was na yet out o' my mind, an' I tould him I wud hae nothing to do wi' the like again.

“ ‘Then lose your bride,’ says he, wi’ a deevlish laugh, ‘an’ bide a puir deevil a’ your days—it’s nothing to Dougald: an’ a’ the thanks he gets for his good will is to be ca’ed a smuggler; ye ’d better be off an’ send the guager after him, man—ye ’ll mak’ a good luck penny by that.’ An’ off he flung, as if he was in strong anger at me.

“But weel did the cunning scoundrel ken the strong grip he had o’ me. I cud na bear the word he said about the guager, and I followed hot fut to tell him so. ‘It’s no’ my father’s son that ever was an informer,’ said I; ‘an’ weel I ken your advice was meant for the best; but what can I do? if ye had tholed what befel me, I’m thinking ye wud be less keen o’ the trade ye’re sel’.’ ‘If I had tholed what ye hae,’ repeated he, sneeringly; ‘weel, lad, *may be*, as ye say, some day I’ll let ye see whether I ken or no, what the excise chields can do—d—n them—aye, an’ what a stout heart an’ a canny

head may do wi' them. I'm no' thinking they'll say they ever made muckle o' Dougald Dorach. I didna think ye was so faint hearted; but ye're wise—ye're wise. I'll just tell ye this, however, that a' the guagers in king George's pay wud mak but a sma' figure in Glen Shlichard.'

"I need na tell you a' that passed atween me an' black Dougald, sir. Pride, an' anger, an' love, a' thegither, wi' his cursed airt to blow them up, put me clean out o' my judgment. I scarcely kent what I was doing or saying; and little indeed did I dream what a deevil I was putting mysel' into the hands o'. It was days before I gave consent to the villain's offers, and followed him into Glen Shlichard. Many a whisky still had I seen, an' many a brewst o' good drink had I he'ped at the making o'—and faith, in Ireland the work is no ill done; but the like o' this wild glen an' its wild people I had never seen afore—perhaps the like o' it is na to be found in a' Scotland or Ireland thegither. Men, and women, and bairns, from the lass or the lad o' fourteen, to the wee bit slip o' five years that cudna but carry a peat, or pick up a bit wood for the fire, all were busy wi' the one thing, the malting and brewing o' barley for uiskapeh; and in a calm morning, ye might count fires almost by the hunder, rising from every black newk an' birken wood in the glen.

"O but it was a strange sight to see that great glen, wi' it's bonny woods, an' it's green-grass

meadows, an' it's high mountains, wi' their briests covered knee high wi' grass, an' a little blooming heather—and their dark neuks an' corries, an' the wild, sharp scaurs running up into the very clouds; an' to see the black bothies scattered thick, in *toons* like, all over it, in every sheltered glaik an' corner; or on the river side, among the arne trees that grow on its banks—swarming wi' men an' women, an' bairns—an' fint a pleugh in the hail glen, or de'il a bit o' corn growing—only a wee potatoe rig, to boil the pot, when the meal run scarce, or when they cud na get a stray sheep or a deer to pike the bones o'—no thought there but o' the malt an' the whisky. As for sheep or cattle, they might hae a wheen coos just to gi'e them milk till their porradge an' potatoes; an' every one had his sheltie or two to carry the barley an' the whisky—an' may be some sheep or goats, just to keep up a show to the factor; but as for stock, de'il a beast had they to call stock. The grass was eaten close eneugh near the bothies, but not a lip except that of the deer or the roe ever touched the long fat grazings o' the hills, that were belly deep in what was useless to man.

“But it was no wonder, sir, that things were this way in Glen Shlichard, for ye see what a place it is for the trade, and how hard it is for the gaugers to trouble the lads at their work: there's not a pass but has it's watching post; an' as we hae had some cause to ken, de'il a one can come into

the glen without being instantly seen, an' provided for, as may be required. Into this strange place it was then, that Dougald Dorach took me first—an' faith ye wud ha'e tain him for the very king o' it. The fellow had a way o' commanding fouk as good as himsel', as if he were the master; and no one thought o' ever disputing it to his face. To tell the truth, he was assuredly a real active, clever, and dauring chield; and whenever there was desperate work to be done; when danger or difficulty appeared, Dougald was the man to be called on, and was sure to be the foremost in every thing. He was the life o' every bothy he entered, for whatever was in his heart, his face was aye smiling when it pleased himsel'; and the very chaps whom he commanded in the morning, and whom he made to work like a Turk when a job was on hand, he would laugh wi', and joke wi', and spare no pains to make his friends and restore them to humour. There was na a plan laid but Dougald was at the framing o' it—an' in short, to counter the word o' Dougald Dorach in Glen Shlichard, would have been as mad as to have disputed the will o' Seaforth in *Kintail*, or Lovat in the *Aird Macimie* afore the forty-five.

“ To make a long tale short, sir, awa' went my puckle barley on the back o' shelties, to the stills o' Glen Shlichard, an' out again by the Kheimna-Mearlach pass in the whisky ankers. Dougald advanced me a trifle of money on my receipt, an'

I drew bills on him for more. The house was built, and a chield in Glen Shlichard, at Dougald's desire, gave me three good milk coos for another bill. I was now as often at the still as in my farm; and so well was I pleased wi' the promised profits of the work, and so satisfied of its freedom from all considerable risk, that I was easily persuaded by Dougald to enter into something o' a partnership in the general trade. Not content wi' disposing o' what was my own, I bought other corn from dealers that cam' to the glen, and engaged mysel' for payment to a fearsome amount, believing all the time that I was sure o' three-fould profits; fool that I was, I might ha'e seen that Dougald took care not to plunge so deep, or else that the corn dealers did na like him as their merchant, for his name was to but few of the bills I had to sign.

“While this work was going on, I went but little to Ardnagrask—at least to see the gude man; for I had made an oath wi' mysel' never again to open my lips on the subject o' my last conversation wi' May an' her father, till I cud do so boldly, as a man weel to do in the world. As for May, I was ow'r proud to open my mouth to her, unless I could do so to some purpose; and the very hope of being able so to do, served to support me under what else wud have borne hard upon my heart. But for all that, often, often hae I wandered about the doors at nicht, an' watched her in the gloaming, when she little thocht who was near her; and

God and mysel' only ken what I suffered from the force I put upon mysel' to keep from speaking till her.

“Six months or thereby, passed in this way. Though I was weel acquaint wi' the still work an' the farming, I had little skill o' business an' accounts; but Dougald aye told me o' the great heap o' money that was coming from our agents in Glasgow, an' what was owing by the fook o' the country—aye, an' by the lairds themsel's, about us. But still I was forced to grant new bills, and be to bear the craving o' the workmen that finished my bit housie—a blythe wee place it is to this day they say—aye, an' the very labourers on my farm. An' a' this time if ever I chanced to meet wi' May Macivor, her could leuks or the confusion she put on, hindered me from speaking or from putting mysel' often in the way of her scorn. Little did I think what was the cause o' it a'.

“One nicht, after lousing the beasts from the pleugh, I was taking them home, when a neighbour o' mine cam' up to me. ‘Good e'en, Duncan, quo' he. ‘Good e'en, Robbie,’ quo' I—‘there's a fine nicht, man—ha'e ye any news?’ ‘Ou, 'haith, I hae little news; it's frae yersel' I shuld speer them, ye go more about the country than me—any there is, I'm thinking ye shuld ken more about them than ithers.’ ‘Aye, man, and what's it about?’ said I, carelessly; there's nothing I ken o'.’ ‘What?’ said he, ‘ha' na ye heard o' the

wedding that's to be in Glen Orra?' 'Glen Orra?' said I, and I felt a could groose like com' ow'r me. 'Aye, ye're ould sweetheart, May Macivor, ye ken; she has na lost muckle time atween her joes; an' faith, some fouk's sayin' she has as little to lose.' Ochone, can I ever forget that fearful minat? My limbs almost gave way under me, an' my heart first gied a loup, and then sunk as if it was dead in my briest. All I cud say was, 'May Macivor! how? what?' 'Aye,' said Robbie, who did na see how much I ailed, for he was a kind soul, and wud na hae sought to vex me; 'Aye, we aye thocht she was for you, an' you was for her; but since ye left her, she has made a choice for hersel'. I'se warrant May wudna be long sitting on a hill side afore some one wud be there to help her doon.' 'I leave May Macivor! in the name of God, man, what do ye mean?' said I, staring at him. 'Ou, what div' I ken—but it's the talk o' the toon; an' there's your friend, black Dougald, that ye're so thick wi', has been saying and swearin' that ye did na care a sneeshau for her. And trouth it leuked very like it, for Glen Orra has na seen muckle o' you for awhile back they say.' 'Ow'r true, ow'r true,' I cud na help saying, wi' a wild groan. 'Aye, faith man, true it is they're saying; and as for Dougald, when is he out o' it? an' 'haith it's no wonder, for the father's ceevil eneugh, an' no one can say but May's a bonnie lassie—aye, an' a kind one to him

too they're sayin'.' 'Dougald !' said I, wi' a fearful voice ; for I felt as if the thunder itsel' had fallen on me. 'Aye, Dougald, man ; but ye need na roar so to a body ; who wud ha'e thocht all this wud ha'e been news till you, man ?'

'Weel, sir, there was a little pride in me yet ; an' though I was 'most foaming at the mouth wi' fury, I keep it in till Robbie tell't me a' he kenned. I found that Dougald had surely given out that I was angered wi' ould Macivor's stiffness, an' wi' his daughter's airs, an' that I had made up my mind to have nothing further to do wi' her as sweetheart or wife. My constant absence from the glen and my farm, gi'ed a color to this tale ; and while Dougald tuke this way to drive me out o' the gait, he tuke care to shut it up against a' else, by keeping it himsel' ; so that afore long he was weel kenned, as they declared, an' as most fou'k thocht, the favoured lover of May.

"Ye may weel think I was mad, sir. I flew like a wild beast to the dwelling o' Dougald, an' it was lucky for us both, perhaps, that he was na there ; for surely that alone prevented murder. As to reason, it was na me that wud hae listened to it then. I mind weel that a storm had been brewing through the day, an' the clouds were black all over the sky, an' rain begood to fall as I left Dougald's house ; but heedless of the late hour an' the wild nicht, I flew like a madman to Ardnagrask. As I passed the window on my

way to the door, I cud see May and her father sitting thegither, by a bright spunk o' fire. She was busy wi' some work, while the ould man was gazing into the lowing peats; and they leuked so quiet an' calm, that the sight something sobered my frantic wildness. But my face must have tell't the tale, for no sooner had I entered the room, than May turned pale, an' her father jumped up wi' a start, and cried out, 'Bless me, Duncan, man, what's come ow'r ye noo?' For my part, sir, I was quite stounded at finding mysel' so suddenly in the presence of May an' her father, without a thocht o' what I had to say, or kenning very weel what I wanted; so that I stood afore them for awhile quite stupit like, an' silent.

" 'Come ben, man, to the fire, an' tell us what is't,' said Macivor, making room for me; 'see, May's clean frightened at seeing ye in sic a fluster—what's the matter?' 'In God's name,' cried I, at last, gasping like a drowning man, 'what is this I hear about May? May, dearest May Macivor, can it be? it surely is na true that ye ha'e consented to marry Dougald Dorach?'

" 'And pray Duncan Maccombich,' interrupted Ardnagrask, rising wi' a proud anger, 'may I ask you what you have to say against any match I may choose to make for my daughter? May, dear, go out o' this—this young man seems disposed to say what it wunna please you to hear—leave us, maithal.' I thought she wud hae fallen

on the spot, as she rose, an' was tottering to the inner door, still paler than afore—and I ran to support her. 'Let my girl alone, Maccombich,' said Macivor. But she didna bide my grip; for gathering hersel' up, like a hare starting from a droug, she shot through the open door, an' was out o' my sight in a moment.

"The terror, and almost the hatred that was in her face as she leuked at me in passing, struck like a knife to my very heart; an' I stood in the spot like a man stunned wi' a blow. 'And noo,' said the tacksman, screwing up his face, as if he was hardening himsel' against me; 'And noo, Maccombich, what have you to say to me or May? I will answer for her.' 'It's little I ha'e to say, noo, Ardnagrask,' said I. 'When I spoke till ye last about this very matter, your own words were "The man who wants my bairn most hae a decent steading, a weel stocket byre, an' a wheen lying siller." I ha'e been labouring since syne, nicht an' day, late and early, for all this, and socht na to gi'e you or her trouble till it was a' there ready, an' now I hear that anither man has courted and won the woman I was striving for.' 'Weel, sir, ye're no' the only man that has a good farm, an' good plenishing, I take it; nor did I make any promise to you: all I said was, that May's husband most ha'e a' this. An' even noo, for all your noise, how div I ken that ye ha'e what 'ill keep a wife decent? have I no' rather muckle

reason to think the contrar'. Just be easy, friend Maccombich. I said, May Macivor's gude man most be a steady, sober, hard-working man—an' tak' ye my word for 't, no disorderly, dissipated spendthrift, will get her consent or mine.'

" 'An' who dares to call *me* such, Ardnagrask?' said I, firing up again wi' pride. 'I defy any one to say the word o' me wi' truth. Leuk at my farm—is it like the farm o' an idler or a sloven? In what am I a spendthrift? Hae I lived in the sight o' my neighbours to deserve such a name? Or what debauchery hae I been guilty o' that I should hear mysel' called a dissipated fellow?'

" 'Weel, Maccombich, since ye challenge me this way, I'll just answer ye as fairly. For your farm, ye're lucky in honest, active servants, who do more in your absence may be, then ye do yeresel' when ye're there—an' that's no sae often as it might be, they're saying—an' ye're new house is gran', man, an' trouth they're bonnie kine ye've got, an' a hantle of gude butter and cheese nae doubt ye'll get from them, for bye the drap milk ye'll seek yeresel'. But can ye tell me, Maccombich, that all this is as honestly paid for as its weel gotten up? Hae ye nae debts, man? 'Out o' debt out o' danger,' they say, an' it's a good saying, lad. Can ye declare ye're no in the fear nor the reverence o' any man?'

“ I felt my cheeks redden like a coal, as the tacksman said this ; but I still thocht mysel’ right, an’ held up my face proudly as I answered him. ‘ Weel, Ardnagrask, them that tell’t ye o’ my debts might as weel hae tell’t ye that I hae more than ’ill pay them a’, an’ leave the pose o’ lying money ye set sae mickle store by. I never denied that my name’s to some bits o’ bills ; but see ye afore the year’s out whether stock, an’ plenishing, an’ money, an’ a’s no clear in my own hands, an’ no man to thank for it.’

“ ‘ Weel, lad, as ye say, we’ll see,’ said Macivor, who I thocht gied a bit o’ screw as if he was in pain when I spoke o’ the bills. ‘ An’ for your own sake, Maccombich, I wish it may a’ be the case ; but after a’ hoo is it gotten—hoo did ye come by a’ this wealth—it’s a wonder there’s none o’ it come in yet to show. An’ what’s become o’ a’ the crop, lad ? Now, whisht man, whisht a bit, just hear me a moment, for there’s no gude in muckle clavering. It’s no’ me that’s sae straight-laced as to quarrel wi’ a man for a bit scurry to the hills—it whiles may help a poor man over a hard rent-day, an’ gar a sma’ barnyard go farther ; but it’s another story when the bothy an’ the still run awa’ wi’ time, an’ crop, an’ a’, an’ wastes the gear instead o’ helping it. I hae heard o’ your doings in Glen Shlichard, lad ; it’ll be the Irish business over again, an’ it’s downright ruin the

way ye tak' it. But it's no business o' mine nor o' my daughter's either. May has more sense than to tak' up wi' any slippery chiel that may think proper to seek her favour, an' I canna see why any man should tak' on him to question her will or mine in a matter that only concerns oursel's.'

" 'An' so, sir,' answered I, keeping in my anger as well as I cud, an' leuking at him proudly eneugh, 'Dougald Dorach is the man!'—— 'An' if he be,' said the tacksman, 'what hae ye to say against it?' 'Only this,' said I trembling wi' rage, 'that Dougald Dorach is a black, treacherous villain, who has betrayed his friend; an' think ye he's the man to mak' May a good husband?' 'Ye're angry, Maccombich, ye're angry; and an angry man's word can seldom be a just one. I see no treachery in Dougald telling the truth; an' for a husband, perhaps May mayna be disposed to tak' your word for his worth—a rival is no' often the man to give the fairest judgment;'—but even while Macivor spoke thus there was a confusion in his face an' manner that showed he did na' feel quite satisfied about the usage I had met wi' among them.

" 'An' is Dougald himsel', think ye, the plain, sober, steady man, the hard-working, industrious farmer, that ye seek for a son-in-law, Ardnagrask?' said I. 'Has he no dealings in Glen Shlichard? no work wi' whiskey stills? no trade wi' smugglers? Is he the weel doing, quiet lad, ye deny

me to be? But I scorn to bear tales, or to return the ill he has done me, behind his back. Our accounts must be settled in another fashion. But one thing I'll tell you fairly, Ardnagrask. I hae courted your daughter—courted her fairly and openly; she liket me weel once, an' ye hadna any ill will to me yersel'—it's from her own mouth I most hae my discharge; an' if ye dinna gi' me word o' her, ye maun just tak' the consequences, for this night I'm a desperate man.' 'In troth, Duncan,' replied the tacksman, 'I canna see the use o' it; but if May does na object, neither will I, and that we'll soon see.'

"With that he went out, an' soon returned wi' the poor lassie, leuking more like a vision than a a living thing. It was a cruel deed o' me, sir, to force her till it; but I was na mysel'—I was na mysel'. 'Here is May,' said the tacksman, 'say till her what ye please, I'll no' be in yere way. I can depend on my lassie, an' ye sha' na' hae to say but I gied ye fair play at any rate. I'll go an' leuk at the baists in the byre out by.' With that he left the room, an' I was alone in't wi' May.

"Oh! sorely, sorely did she tremble as she stood, for sit she wudna—an wildly did her colour go and come as she waited to hear me speik; but at last it settled into one small red spot on each cheek, while the rest o' her face an' lips were as white as the hankercher on her neck. O how different was she from the last time I spoke

till her, when she daunted me wi' her wild fleering way !

“ As for me, my knees shook under me, an' I was forced to lean a hand on the table to support me, an' my heart was beating like a smith's hammer in my briest. All the love I ever felt for the lovely creture afore me, rose in my heart as it was when we were like brother and sister thegether, as if she had never been but kind to me—an' if she had asked me for my very blood—O it wud hae been joy for me to spill it every drop for her. The thocht o' losing her went like a knife through me, an' forced me to speik, although I scarcely kent what I was saying.

“ ‘ O May, dear, speik to me,’ I stammered, ‘ ye loved me once, ye canna deny it, an' how hae I angered you to deserve a' this? Speik, dear May, can ye bear to see me driven to despair after all the hopes I had—aye, that ye yoursel' gave me?’ But not a word could the poor girl say; but her briest heaved sorely, an' the heavy sobs she gave shook her from head to fut. ‘ An' are ye quite faithless, May?’ said I. ‘ An' is this the way an honest lad shu'd be dealt wi'? But I see how it is, an' let some fou'ks tak' care.’—— She started, and leuked at me wi' the blood rushing a' ow'r her face, an' her brows were bent wi' a wild gaze. ‘ Yes,’ I continued, wi' my anger rising as I spoke, for I had a deevilish pleasure to see I had moved her—‘ yes, let false friends

beware! This Dougald, who has betrayed me, an' stolen awa' what I loved more than a' things in this earth, he may chance to find that Duncan Maccombich's no' the lad to be made a foot-ball or a stepping-stone by any man. May the curse o' ——' 'Oh!' cried May wi' a kind o' wild low shriek at last—'O Duncan, for God's sake, for my sake, if ever ye loved me, stop, an' dinna curse him! Ye hae said ow'r true—it's a' my fault. I was faithless, as ye say, for I didna ken my own mind. I was young an' foolish, may be, but God knows I meant no ill to you. Could I help it if another made himsel' more acceptable to me than you? Was I na free to choose for mysel' the man wi' whom I was to pass my life? O Duncan, I value your good qualities, an' fain, O fain wud I hae ye for my friend. O if ye wud be content wi' that, an' never seek for more! But any way, dinna let your love turn to hate—dinna be my enemy. O dinna curse the man who *must* now be the husband o' her ye once loved sae weel! O Duncan! curses are fearful things even from the bad—for the sake o' God dinna let them fall on us from him who should hae been our friend!' It seemed as the poor lassie's grief had burst forth from a' bounds, and cudna stop, until its very violence brought it to an end. Her anguish was so fearful that I cudna stand it. Her eyes like coals o' fire were starting from her head, an' her white cheeks were streaked wi' dark crimson, as if

the tears fell from her eyes had scalded their way down.

“ ‘God forbid, May Macivor,’ said I more gently, ‘that I should do you any wrong: for your sake I’ll try to drown my passion; but dinna let me see the villain’s face—I canna answer for mysel’ if he comes in my way.’ ‘O Duncan!’ said she earnestly, ‘mind what God himsel’ has said, “Thou shalt not kill!” O think o’ that awful commandment, an’ never tempt the breaking o’ it—never mix in strife wi’ one against whom ye hae a grudge? Who can master anger? or who can tell what a rash word may lead to?’ ‘He’s safe from me, May—the false traitor is safe!’ said I. ‘God grant he prove a better husband to you than he has a friend to me. But, O May! little do ye ken the man yere trusting to! Weel, weel,—I see in your very ee, how little ye wud mind what I might say against him—so it’s vain for me to speik. What’s the Lord’s will maun be, but ’ore the year’s over, I’m feared ye’ll hae cause to mind what Duncan Maccombich said. An’ then ye’ll ken the true man from the false.’

“ At that moment Macivor returned to the room, an’ May rushed from it in a fearful state. It was plain enough that the false tales o’ Dougald Dorach had served his own ends, an’ destroyed all chance for me too completely to leave the smallest hope, and my heart was too great to let me stay a minat longer. ‘God bless you, May!’

said I as she went off, an' half choaked wi' the rising in my throat, but too prond to let it be seen—'An' for you, Ardnagrask, I wish you weel; an' its no' an ill wish to hope that your eyes may be one day open to the wrong ye've done a lad who wud hae spent his last shilling an' his last drop o' blood for you an' your daughter, an' who never had thocht o' ill to you or your's.' 'Well, weel lad, I'm no misdoubting it,' said the tacksman, moved a little at last, 'an' I wud blithely see you here as afore, but I'm fearing that'll hardly be for awhile.' 'Na, na,' replied I, 'it'll be awhile 'ore I see Ardnagrask again, or put a fut in bonnie Glenorra,' so wi' one strong grip o' the ould man's han', I rushed out o' the house—it was the last time I ever touched it, an' he in life.'

CHAPTER II.

FORESTER'S STORY CONCLUDED.

“ For green's the grass, and cauld's the clay,
That wraps my Highland Mary !”

“ WHAT was in my heart or in my head when I left the house for ever, where I had once been so welcome, it wud be hard for me to say. My brains was whirling round, an' I'm very sure I was na' in my right senses. I mind thinking the nicht fearful hot, though the could rain was falling fast on me, an' I threw the plaird awa', to let it pelt upon my bare briest. I cud na' think : I scarcely kent what was the matter wi' me. I felt only as if something strange had happened, and it seemed as if my heart was crushed under some terrible weight, an' I drove on along the road at a furious rate, scarcely heeding which way I went. There is a pass in Glenorra, where the little water o' Orra falls over a great lump o' rock into a black pool below. The hills come close thegether,

an' a wheen birch trees that grow among the stones mak' it still darker. The road, after passing the Orra water, winds up the one side of the rock, an' then through the wood an' over the hill towards my own farm. It's a dark eery place even by daylight, and some fouks say it's no' just cannie after the sun's gone doon; an' the wild black clouds that were driving ow'r the face o' the moon, sometimes hiding her wi' a sprinkle o' rain, an' at ithers drawing off to let her light shine out for a moment, clear an' bright, made it worse than perfect darkness.

“ Just as I got to the top of the rock what should I see but something like a tall man, weel wrapped up in his plaid, come linking down the brae. I'll no' say, sir, that full as my heart was, it didna loup to my mouth when this figure, dim in the gloaming moonlight, cam' whudding through the flichtering shadows o' the wood—for the wind was blowing frae me an' not a futstep could I hear. A could sweat burst out on my face, for as wild an' fell as I had been; but I stood on the spot determined to gar the thing speik—if it was sent till me—by giving it the first word. But just as it cam' within twal' paces o' me on an open bit o' the rock, the moon flung out o' a cloud, an' showed me plainly neither wraith nor ghost; but the weel kent form an' face o' Dougald Dorach.

“ It's surely true, sir, what the ministers tells

us whiles, that the enemy o' man is aye on the watch to trap us poor simple mortals into sin; an' wasna this a fearful temptation for one whose heart was boiling like mine wi' fury that I cud na get out? Here was my mortal enemy afore me in a place, where, if I sought to do my worst, there was not a mortal eye to hinder or accuse me. There was the man, an' here was the deep black water that cud tell no tales. An' yet, sir, it was my honest purpose to keep my faith wi' poor May. Never wud I hae socht the man—an' had it no' been for this chance meeting, I wud likely hae quitted the country without ever seeing him. 'Ochone!' said Duncan, shuddering at the recollection, 'it was a fearful moment; an' the gush o' heat that spread through my whole body when I seed that it was him, was surely like a blast from hell itsel'.

"Dougald was na' long o' seeing me neither, as I stood still upon the spot; an' it was wi' something o' a start that he also stood still an' glowred at me. 'Get out o' my road an' out o' my sight ye foul, treacherous villain!' I cudna help saying, an' wi' a wild thundering voice; for though my promise neither to curse nor to hurt the wretch was full upon my mind, I clean forget her advice, and that ill words were na just the best peace makers—'It's a bra' nicht for servants o' the de'il like yoursel' to go seeking mischief in. Out o' my gait and march on your own——'

“ ‘Hoo! man! what the deevil’s a’ this? What dram-shop in Glenorra hae ye been boozing at?’ An’ he made a step or two towards me. ‘Keep off, man!’ said I, ‘keep off, ’ore I’m temptit to gi’ ye what ye deserve. Awa’, an’ never daur to lift your tongue to me again!’ ‘Aye, man, but yere bauld the night; but de’el be in my hand an’ ye leave this bit till ye eat up these bonnie words an’ the bonnie names ye hae put on me. I owe ye something long syne, an’ it’s as well paid here as there, now as after; an’ casting by his plaid I saw in his hand a stout heavy stick, which he flourished over his head.

“ ‘There was nae a moment to spare; an’ ’haith I was na’ muckle disposed to lose one, for the little patience I had was fairly worn out. In one other instant the stick wud have fallen on my head, but wi’ a sudden spring I darted forward within his arm an’ grippet him round the body. The shock was near upsetting him on the place, but he recovered his feet an’ grippet me again, an’ we wrestled an’ wrestled like two madmen upon the narrow path. Dougald was stout an’ tall, an’ weel set upon his joints—in those days may be he was the strongest o’ the two; but I was supple an’ active, an’ there was a strength in me at that moment like that o’ an evil spirit. Dougald himsel’ cudna stand befor’ it—he was sweered to quit haud o’ his stick, an’ that gave me an advantage. In struggling on the rough ground, his

fut tript—may be it was a stone that tuke it, but he fell wi' a heavy dunt on the hard rock, wi' me aboove him.

“ I tried to rise but he held me doon wi' a grip like a smith's vice. May be he thought I was going to do to him, what, God forgive me if I wrong him, I firmly believe he wanted to do to me—to tumble him into the dark hole on the edge o' which we were striving. We were locked this way for near a minute, maybe, when for a moment his right arm quitted its clutch o' my back—in another, I saw a faint blue flash in the moonlight, an' felt a blow an' a sharp stound on the side o' my neck—the fellow had pulled a *skean-dhu* from his hose where he always wore one, an' tried to stab me wi' it in the throat—I felt the warm blood spouting down my briest an' thocht he had killed me, an' wi' a sort o' despair, I seized his wrist afore he could strike me another blow, an' springing up from his loosened grip got my knees upon his briest an' my other hand on his throat. He groaned an' grugled fearfully, an' I felt his limbs failing under me as if he was fainting. But the deevil had fairly got the mastery o' me—I wrested the *skean-dhu* from his hand—‘ Ye hae worked weel for it, man,’ said I, setting my teeth thegither—‘ tak your wages an' be d—d till ye’—I lifted the knife—but just as I was bringing it doon to plung it into his throat, my eyes fell on a dim white figure, rising like a wreath o' mist

above the black pool. The sight stopped my arm, an' straining my eyes, may I never leave this spot, sir, if I didna see a form wi' the face an' figure o' May Macivor hersel' just as she leuked when she pleaded to me for Dougal's life—but far, far more pale an' death-like—an' a soft awsome voice sounded in my ear, as if it came from the roaring o' the waters, '*Thou shalt not kill!*' It fell like ice on my very heart, my rage was gone in a moment, an' I was filled wi' shame an' sorrow—I threw the skean-dhu into the deep black pool, and jumping on my feet, gazed fearfully upon the place where the image o' May had appeared. But it was there no longer—only a wee white cloud o' mist that was rising from the bed o' the burn.

“ It was some moments afore I thocht o' Dougald, who was now coming to himsel' a little ; I heped him to rise, but no sooner had he got upon his feet then he shook me off like a serpent. ‘ Ye're a fool, and the son o' a fool,’ said he wi' a face blacker than the night, ‘ an' sore will ye rue this hour's work 'ore ye're many days oulder—ye'll mind, Dougald Dorach tould ye, lad.’ He gathered up his plaid an' his stick, an' went his way, leaving me half stupid wi' all that had passed, an' sick wi' the loss o' blood that had poured from the cut in my neck.

“ Wild as the hale night's work had made me, I was quiet enough afore I reached my own house again. I mind weel that when I had washed my

hurt and bound it up from the air, I threw myself on the bed, weet and weary as I was, an' grat like a bairn. I felt as if I had nothing more to do in the world, an' cared na how soon I might leave it—but my head was fast wheeling round, an' afore morning I kent nothing o' what was doing about about me. A hot fever was on me an' for many days death and life had a sore wrestle for it. When my strength returned a wee, an' I cud leuk about me, I thocht there was something wrong. The very lad and lass that were looking after me, and an honest ould neighbour from the toon doon by, that cam' in to see if I was leeving, daur'd na raise their eyes to me, nor answer me a word. But the truth cam' out soon eneugh, an' bit by bit I cam' to ken the full amount o' the black Dougald's villany.

“ I found out that this fellow had na been long in Glenorra, where he cam' at first about some o' his smuggling jobs, when the wealth o' ould Ard-nagrask, an' the beauty o' his daughter, led him to think o' trying to gain her love; the black villain! it was through me that he became acquaint wi' them both. Weel did he ken that my courtship had already gone far; but that was a matter he cared little about, except in so far as it might be in his own way; an' it afterwards became clear that he had na even made up his mind to marry the poor lassie, unless he should find her father's wealth a sufficient temptation.

“I tould you, sir, that Dougald had a handsome figure an’ a bewitching tongue. Ochone! they were ow’r successful wi’ poor May Macivor. She believed all his flatteries an’ promises; and thocht not only that Dougald was a generous, noble-minded man, but a rich one, both able an’ willing to support a wife in plenty an’ comfort.

“With the ould man he was not less successful, but he seed that I was no small favourite there; an’ in order to get rid o’ a dangerous rival, he laid his infernal plot o’ getting me to join his smuggling concerns, an’ hooking me by fair promises into debts and difficulties, of which I was altogether ignorant and innocent; and while he made the tacksman believe he was sweert to say an ill word o’ a friend an’ neighbour, he let out such tales an’ stories, as made me out to be a wild foolish schemer, an’ a thoughtless profligate fellow, an’ yet keepit so near the truth that his falsehood was na like to be discovered.

“The ould man, who saw no cause for doubting the report o’ a friend, soon gave up his good opinion o’ me; but May, who knew me weel, was na so easily deceived. She cudna believe all the ill she heard o’ me; and it was only when by his airt he keepit me awa’ from the house, an’ got me in that way to gi’ a color to his assurances that I had given her up, that I cared na for her after what had passed, an’ when his own flatteries had begood to work on her heart, it was only then that

her judgment gave way, an' she listened to his evil reports.

“ Ill was it for hersel', poor lassie, as weel as for me, that she let hersel' be blinded by his deevilish tricks, an' strange enough it is to think how he contrived to get round ould Ewen Macivor, a long-headed, sensible man, in the way he did—aye, an' how he managed to keep the hale country side in the dark about his wild works an' vicious doings.

“ One would hae thocht that Dougald might hae been contented wi' robbing me o' my mistress, an' slandering my good name; but these were trifles to him, an' though all that came to me from his hands afterwards was but light to what his first villainy made me suffer, yet he was resolved, it seemed, to mak' the job complete. The first day I gaed ow'r the door, I found my stable an' byre empty. My servants hadna had the heart to tell me, that when I was sick, not able to speak or hear, the sheriffs offishers had come an' ta'en awa' the beasts to answer one o' the bills for barley that fell due then. Before I had recovered the stun o' this blow, other bills came pouring in; an' the labourers to whom I owed money grew craving. I sent a friend to Dougald—I cudna bear to go mysel'—to seek the money o' the whiskey that cam' o' my barley, an' for my share o' other lots o' corn which I had gotten for my own bill. The villain laughed in his face, an' tould him to show some paper to prove the delivery o' the barley :

but he said he held some receipts o' mine for money lent me, which he expected to receive out o' hand. I was dumbfounded: to deny receiving my barley! to pretend that the sums paid me in part, were lent by him to me! what was I then to expect in settling the accounts atween us for hunders o' bolls. Good reason had I to dread the upshot. Dougald's answer was short. 'Ye may tell Maccombich,' said he to my friend, 'that the nicht he kens o', an' may be some other matters that he does na dream o', cleared a' scores atween him an' me. If he wants to hear more, he may seek me in Glen Shlichard, or he may bring his proof o' what he craves, in any court o' law—I'm ready to meet him there if he daures. In the mean time, let him pay to me the money I lent him, or he'll hear o' it may be in a way he wunna like.'

"The matter was now clear eneugh—weel did he ken that I cudna go into court—that a business like ours in Glen Shlichard, was no for a sheriff's court or a judge an' jury. I saw too late the fool I had been to trust so much to a man of whom I kent nothing, and who was too sharp to gie me the smallest haud o' him. I saw that I was a ruined man. Bill upon bill came forward now, an' scarcely was I able to leuk after my own affairs, when stock, an' crop, an' plenishing, were a' roupit an' I was clapped up in the gaol o' — for a debt that was none o' mine, and o' an amount I never cud hope to pay. It was a heavy addi-

tion to my misfortunes, sir, for a lad like me that was only too fond o' ranging aboot, an' who never kent what it was to have his fut tied, to be coopit up like a bird in a cage in the bonnie summer time, when the woods were a' green, an' the air fresh, an' when I shuld hae been travelling my own hills as blythe as any deer amongst them. But not a friend had I to speik up for me. Your worthy grandfather was dead an' gone; the family was awa' to the South, an' it wasna in a poor country side like ours that I could expect people to help me out o' such a straight.

In gaol then did I lie for six long months, till the foup were tired o' a tormenting me, an' found there was nothing more to be got from me. Then they let me out, a ragged, miserable, penniless, houseless wretch, to go and hide my shame an' my sorrow where I liket. But the bird will aye back till its own nest, harried tho' it be, an' the fox till its own ruined hole—an' where cud I go, but back to bonnie Glen Struan, although neither farm nor shelter was there for me.

“The neighbours received me kindly, but I found there were many changes in the country, and sad, sad ones in Glenorra. It wud be nonsense to say that I shud have grieved muckle for the downfall o' an enemy that had done me much ill; but woe's me! who wud na hae mourned ow'r the miserable wreck that his cursed treachery made o' beauty, an' innocence, an' goodness! Three

months had scarcely passed after I had been taken awa' to — when some other folks better skilled in business matters than me, begood to hae their doubts o' Dougald's character. The story he tould himsel' o' his cast out wi' me, didna satisfy those who made inquiry into the matter, an' it was observed that even his own purchases began to be ill-paid.

“Some o' them too that held my bills for corn, but who kent weel enough whare it went, an' that Dougald an' me were thegither in the malting an' distilling business, insisted wi' him that he shuld say what becam' o' the spirits, an' account to them, if no to me, for the value o' it.

“Dougald found that things were getting serious, and he saw that the faces o' his neighbours were looking strange on him: it was said, that even in Glen Shlichard, where he had been as king, his power was beginning to fail; but, however that may hae been, he tuke the part o' fleeing from the storm he daured na longer stand. No one could say exactly when or how Dougald left the country—for he often was absent from his home, for days an' even weeks. But he did make a moonlight flitting, an' those who cam' to catch him in his nest, found it could, an' the bird awa'.

“The souch o' his flight soon spread, an' it was na long 'ore it got to Glenorra. Its effects there were fearful. Ever from the time o' my last visit to Ardnagrask, a nicht no' to be forgotten by any

o' us, May Macivor had been seen to droop. She was absent and melancholy, an' her friends begood to fear she was going into a decline. She had cause enough for sorrow. What had passed between her an' Dougald after his meeting wi' me, was never fully kenned, but none ever suspected the dreadful truth. For days, an' even for weeks afore the villain's departure, her sadness increased; her cheeks lost all their fine colour, an' becam' wan an' hollow; an' the tears, they said, wud often be running doun, without a word o' complaint out o' her mouth.

“One calm evening in July, May had wandered from the door till a bonnie blaeberry bank, a wee bit from the house. She was ow'r weak to go far from home then, poor thing! It was a pleasant spot;—the sun was glinting blythely through the birks that hung ow'r it upon the purple heather; but the heat o' the day was ow'r, an' she sat wi' a wee bit lassie at her feet, thinking, nae doubt, on a' her troubles—an' God help her! they were neither few nor small, though little did any one dream o' what she had to bear. She was sitting here in her meek quiet way, when up comes her father, Ardnagrask, in a great consternation. ‘By the great oath, May!’ says he, ‘I’m a ruined man!—an’ God help me, child, ye’ll be little better off!—There’s Dougald Dorach fled the country.’—‘Dougald fled the country, father!’ cried May, wi’ a face that might hae fear’d him if he had

once looked at it; ‘that’s no’ possable: what fool tould ye this lee?’—‘Na, de’el a lee is it, my chield. The villain’s off, and left me to pay the two hunder pounds I got him on his bill: the shirra offishers are a’ after him, but de’el a word hae they o’ him.’ That word, sir, was the poor lassie’s death-blow. She gied one wild screech, an’ started up wi’ a bound till her feet, then swarfed awa’ clean dead at his fut. The poor man stood for a moment or two stupified like, and then hasted to tak’ up his daughter. He called her his dear child, his life, his darling; O would she na speak till him? an’ wi’ the bit lassie’s help, he loused her hankercher about her neck, an’ did what he cud to recover her. It was then, poor man, that he tuke the first dread o’ what had ailed the unfortunate girl so long; he saw that Dougald had been a greater villain than he thocht for, an’ that poor May had only too good cause for her sorrow an’ wasting. It was a blow to the ould man that he never recovered. He laid his daughter on the ground again, and broke out into fearfu’ curses on the foul ruffian who had ruined her. ‘Weel, Duncan,’ he said, your words hae proved ow’r true, an’ weel are ye revenged o’ the ill ye had, puir lad! My eyes are opened now wi’ a witness; an’ a sore heart wud it gi’ you the day, for all the vexation ye had from us, to see the way we are just now.’ O he spoke but the truth o’ me—sore, sore did I grieve; but what did that avail?

Long, long did the deadly swoon continue, an' when May Macivor did recover from it, it was only to fall into such terrible fits as soon brought on her hour. Awful, they say, were her sufferings, poor, poor deluded creature ! but at last they had an end. She became the mother o' a wee lass-bairn, but the life o' it cost her own. Before the nicht was past, sweet May Macivor was a cold streekit corpse in the very place where I had sae often seen her blooming like a new-blown rose. O God help me ! but my heart is like to burst yet, when I mind o' the bonnie, blithesome, warm-hearted lassie, pure an' innocent ; an' O, so fair an' sweet as I hae seen her!—an' to think that she's now in her dark cold grave ! O villain !—ruffian !—we have met, an' we will meet again !—I ken it weel—it is my wierd an' yours, an' the day will come ! Yet, if ye'll believe me, sir, I never did curse him. No ; many times has the wicked thought crossed my brain ; but the remembrance of that sweet murdered lassie has aye risen up in my heart, an' saved me from the sin. No ; I leave him to the justice o' his Maker ; an' whatever may be my fate or his, never shall the word come from me that wud call doun on him a heavy doom." The agitation of the forester at this place so great, as for some time to prevent his continuing. But after a while, he recovered his composure, and proceeded with his tale, which now, however, drew near its conclusion.

“ Weel, sir, poor May was carried to the grave, an’ if a grand burial could hae comforted a broken-hearted father, Ewen Macivor might hae felt consolation that day ; for scarce a body was there in a’ the glens around for many miles, ‘that didna show themselves at Ardnagrask. But the grief was too deep, an’ the blow too heavy to be lightened by neighbours’ kindness, or world’s respect. Some said that the ould man got his death by the long hot walk to the kirkyard, for he never quitted the head o’ the coffin a’ the way, for as hot as the sun was, though many times the friends were forced to support him to keep him from falling under it. But them that kent him best, said that from the time o’ his daughter’s death, he was a doomed man ; an’ it’s a sure thing that ould Niel Bain, the taishtear, who saw the corpse-lights a week before the burial happened, tould them that tould me, that he seed Ewen Macivor wi’ the grave-clothes as high as his briest, as he followed the corpse. For my part, I say, that as sure as the sun’s in heaven, Dougald Dorach murdered the father as weel as the daughter ; for it was his deed that did the work on both. In less than a month ould Ewen was laid beside his daughter in the kirkyard.—Lord grant them both a’ happy rising !

“ A brother o’ his succeeded to the tack, an’ occupied the farm ; but to the surprise of a’ the neighbours, it appeared that the affairs o’ the late

man were in a very ill state, an' that forbye the money he had become bound for on Dougald's account, he was more than three hunder pounds in debt ; an' that stock an' crop wud scarce pay it off. People cudna think how a careful sensible man like Ewen Macivor, had allowed himsel' be cheated by any one, even as clever as Dougald Dorach. But that false deceiver had surely made him believe that he was a man o' large property ; and it was known after, that he had shown the tacksman papers an' invoices o' large cargoes, belonging, he said, to himsel'. An' it was further said that Ewen, considering him as his son-in-law, had agreed to sign a bill of two hunder pounds, to enable Dougald to complete the price o' a cargo o' wood and corn to carry on his trade. It was this loss that had driven the ould man wild, an' caused the outbreak before his daughter, which destroyed her.

“ As for the puir bairn, it was left to the mercy and charity o' the new tacksman, its uncle, and that they say was but a sma' trust an' a could one ; but he wasna long burthened wi' it, miserable thing ! They say the woman that nursed it was kinder till her own than till it, an' the puir bairn dwined and dwined, an' some said the evil eye was on it. But at last it disappeared—no one weel kent how ;—some said, the fairies teuk it awa'. The woman said, she missed it one day from the bit cradle, and cud give no more account about it ;

an' they're saying, de'il a one that had a right, cared to ask her muckle about it. But this way, in little better than a month, the family o' the Macivors, that were sae blythe an' weel-doing when I first kent them, were a' swept from the face o' the earth, an' the bonnie farm o' Ardnagrask passed into the hands o' strangers.

“What was Glen Orra, or Glen Struan, or any place or parts o' the country now to me? I was a ruined, broken-hearted man, without friends or home, or ought to love or care for on the earth,—I might say, without bread to eat, or the means o' getting it, forbye the charity o' them I kent afore, or the work o' my own hands. My heart was sore, an' I cudna bear the sight o' places where I had once been so happy, an' where I now must wander about disgraced an' despised. Wi' the trifle o' clothes I had saved tied up in a pocket hankercher, an' not a penny in purse or pocket, did I leave Glen Struan, neither hoping nor wishing to see it any more. I went ow'r the hill to the kirkyard, just to see the last resting-place o' May Macivor an' the ould man; there they were fresh an' green, an' the gowans growin' on them already. My heart swelled like to burst, an' setting my briest to the brae, I turned my back on Glen Orra an' a', an' started off without muckle caring where Providence might send me.

“Little meat passed my mouth that day, an' as little did I want it. I was sitting on a stone by

the side o' a track that ran through a wide muir, just as the night was falling, an' thinking that the warm side o' a bauk, wi' my plaid about me, wud be my best quarters for the nicht, when a drove of cattle passed by. There was but one man an' a boy driving them, an' I was thinking wi' mysel' 'they've eneugh to do wi' the baists,' when the man himsel' cam' up, an' gied me the good time o' the nicht very civilly; I answered him in the same way. 'Are ye going the road?' says he. 'Perhaps I am,' says I. 'Weel,' says he, 'if that's the case, an' if ye'll gie me a han' wi' thae baists till the night's halt two or three miles on by, ye'll get a supper an' a bed, an' a dram, wi' thanks beside.' 'I dinna care if I do,' said I; so up I got, an' went wi' the drover.

"It was a gay long three miles to the halting-place for a man that had travelled the hale hot day without bite or sup, even on; but I made it out so much to the drover's pleasure, that he asked me if I wud go on wi' him the next day for meat an' wages. 'My own lad,' said he, 'fell sick on the road, an' I be to leave him where he was; an' another helper made a moonlight flitting, so I'm ill eneugh off wi' the boy, an' I wud fain have the help o' a man that kens something o' the trade, as ye do, or I'm mista'en.' 'An' how far may ye be going?' said I, thinking wi' mysel' that it might not be a bad way o' getting my bread till better should cast up. 'To Falkirk,' said he, 'and

maybe to England; just as it happens.' Weel, sir, to end the tale, the man Donald Campbell was pleased wi' me, an' I wi' him. So I tuke up service wi' him, an' the very next day awa' wi' him to Falkirk. He was a drover in good business, weel kenned on the road, an' thocht to have a wheen money lying. He paid me good wages, an' for three years he was a kind master to me, an' not a word o' cast out had we. In the course o' our trade, we travelled ow'r the most o' Scotland, Highlands and Lowlands, an' were weel acquaint wi' the best grazing counties in England. At the end o' that time, having saved a little money mysel', Campbell, who was a fair-dealing honest man, finding me weel up to the business, agreed to gie me a share wi' himsel'. It might hae been better for me to have staid as I was; but who can say after a'?'—an' surely it was no fault o' his. For two years we got on weel eneugh, an' I was beginning to think once more o' a farm o' my own, when, as the mischief wud hae it, just as we had made large bargains o' baists, an' hoped to turn such a penny on them as wud hae made our fortunes out and out, doun cam' the price o' cattle; we wud na sell at so heavy a loss, so we keepit them. The season was wild, an' the pasture unsound. We lost many head, an' at last were forced to sell the rest at what we could get, to save total loss. Campbell, who had money, stood the business, but I was ruined: all I could do, was to pay

my debts honestly ; that I did fully an' fairly, an' was left once more without a guinea o' my own.

“ Weel, sir, Campbell wud hae keepit me, for he kent I was honest an' skilful ; but I had just enough o' the droving trade. I might have done better if I had stuck to it, but it angered me to see a' my hard earned siller clean sweepit awa', just like martinmass leaves, an' my heart grew hard and foolish. I thocht, what's the good o' laying up ? Who hae I to hain for ? Who is there that cares for me ? And what use is there in working an' sweating an' saving, just to lose labour. So I grew heedless, an' desperate like ; when good work cam' in my way I wud work whiles—an' whiles I wud be idle and lazy-like. Sometimes I wud break out, an' sort awhile wi' some o' my ould cronies in the hill, an' tak' a turn at the deer ; and glad were they to see me, an' truth I had aye a good deal to say wi' them, for they kent I was weel up to most things. But I had got a scunner o' the brewing business, and I keepit out o' that scrape again ; aye, though they wrought sore at me, an' offered me more than ever I was like to mak' by honest means. But the brunt child, they say—an' sorely brunt had I been, sure enough. It was in this thowless way I was living, when your honour found me, an' merciful for me was it, for it's my belief that I was going right to the mischief, if a kind friend had na steppit in to save me ; and it's

my hope, sir, that ye have not, an' never will have cause to repent o' your goodness.

“Ye ha'e noo heard my tale, gentlemen, an' more o' my life than ever I tell't before to mortal man. An' what think ye now most I hae felt this blessed day in going over my ould ground, and through the very howffs that I mind so weel, when I was a far other man in body and in mind ! Many a blythe home an' pleasant day hae I seen among them—the like will never be again there ! And in troth, sir, when I thocht that a' the bits o' bothies, where the lads used to brew their drap drink an' be happy, an' thocht no harm, wud a' be soon in a bright low, an' me greatly the cause, it cut me to the heart. I felt almost as if it was a sin I was doing—I could almost as soon have thocht o' pulling down the ruined house o' my fathers. But a servant most obey orders—an' no doubt your honour was right. But what will ye say, Glenvallich, when I tell ye, that yon same Kenneth Dhoruv, that ye seed running down the brae like a madman after us, is the self-same Dougald Dorach whom I have such good cause to ken, an' to hate. Ye may weel think that my heart louped high when I seed him. Twenty years hae passed since last we parted, an' yet not one moment did I doubt who it was ; his form was ow'r weel graven in my heart to be mista'en ; age, and evil doings, or misery, might change him to others, so that

they wudna ken him, but never to me: no—on the very bed o' death I wud ken him, and my flesh wud grooze at his presence. We parted in strife, and in strife we met again. My blood boiled at the sight o' him, an' I gi'ed a wild halloo as I called his name, and ran at him wi' my gun lifted, to fell him to the earth. But anger is a blin' guide—he dooked from the first blow, an' it passed wi' little ill; an' he risid his drawn sword, an' made a wild cut at my head, gnashing his teeth as was his custom. I catched it on the butt o' my gun, an' lifted it once more, wi' better aim, an' as good will. But in the very moment, a woman's form glided in atwixt us—I cudna tell from where—wi' a fearful screech, an' threw her arms about the villain. I scarcely seed the face, for it was turned awa' from me; but weel did I ken the form, aye, an' the very air. May I never leave the spot, sir, if it was na May Macivor hersel' that stood afore me, wi' her arms twined around the man that was her murderer. What happened then I canna tell, for a darkness spread ow'r my een, an' my heart grew as could as ice. The gun fell useless to the ground, an' I mind o' something like a shock upon my briest; but when my senses came again, neither Kenneth nor May were there. The blood was running down my briest, but who gave the stroke I canna rightly say. It might weel hae been himsel', for I seed the sword lifted above me when *she* took hould o' him; but then

what was he after all, that he vanished awa' in such a fashion. As for her, weel do I ken what she was, an' why she cam'; she charged me, when living, no' to lift hand against his life, an' God is my witness I never wished to do so; but it's vain striving against weird, an' that there's doom upon Kenneth an' on me, an' that our fates are knitted thegither for evil, is as sure as that I'm in life this hour. Twice hae we met in strife, an' twice has that angel come to warn me—there's a third time to come, an' that 'ill be the last. I ken weel that my time here 'ill no be long; but I've little left to live for, and I'm no fear'd to die; an' when my name's called, Maccombich will be ready wi' his answer."

There was a simple energy in the manner of the forester, as he concluded his story, which had a powerful effect upon the two friends. The peculiarity of their situation at the moment, the eventful scenes of the past day—the exhaustion consequent even upon successful exertion, conspired with the painful nature of the incidents they had heard to throw a gloom over their spirits, which sympathized with the superstitious despondency of the narrator; so that it was neither immediately nor without an effort that they recollected themselves sufficiently to make an attempt at soothing his agitated mind, or at pointing out the delusion under which he laboured, and of which he had so nearly become the victim.

Tresham was the first to recover himself—“Well, my good fellow,” said he, in a tone expressive of much sympathy, “Your fate has certainly been a hard one, and I feel for you most sincerely. It is no wonder, under all the circumstances you have told us, that you should have been discomposed by what happened to-day; but I can fortunately remove one part of your uneasiness. Your idea of the vision of to-day, at least, is groundless. That young woman whom you saw, who rushed between you and Kenneth, was undoubtedly the same who saved my life not ten minutes before;—when that ruffian, her father, I believe, would have made short work with me. This is the second time I have seen her; for she is also the very girl whom I saw in the *Slochduaine*, on my first visit there. And her father is the fellow who treated me so scurvily that same night—the same, too, who threatened me at Elsie’s cottage not a fortnight ago, and who shot at me at the tenkill. So you may set your heart at rest that *she* had nothing whatever to do with poor May Macivor.”

“Ochone!—ye’re very good, sir—ye’re very good,” replied the forester, slowly, and shaking his head with a bitter incredulous smile. “Fain wud I that it was so—fain wud I think as ye say—but no, no—it canna be—it canna be!—The een micht be daizzelt, an’ the head micht be wrong; but the heart canna mistake. It was never a lass

born o' woman that gar't me grue yon gait !—It was the speerit o' May Macivor hersel, and it's my work this blessed day that brought her from her place—an' a fearful an' a signal warning it is to me."

"Why, Duncan, man !" said Glenvallich, "this is strange in you—this is not like yourself. I have always found you a bold fellow, and I thought you were above such fancies. As Mr. Tresham says, I can make allowance for an unexpected surprise; but that its effects should continue after the moment, that you can allow yourself to be frightened by a shadow, especially after what you have heard, that does surprise me. Mr. Tresham can surely have no motive but to put you right—you cannot doubt what he tells you; and surely there is every likelihood that this same woman whom you took for an apparition is neither more nor less than the daughter of your opponent.—Come, cheer up, man—cheer up; you have done your duty manfully, and it sha'n't be forgotten—Don't let us have to think you silly."

"Many thanks, sir; many thanks," said Duncan gravely; "but ye said I was feared, sir. Ye think me silly, an' a coward, may be," added he with rising colour; "was I feared like, think ye, the day, sir, when ye seed me running 'up to meet wi' thon black-faced villain? or was I feared yestreen, when I went my lone through yon wild glen by nicht, when the deep linn or the black peat-hole wud be the best I had to leuk for, if a soul had

seed me?—No, sir; it's no' what the power o' man can do, that fears me; but sights like yon never come to mortal een but for a purpose, and living man canna thole them without some dread. But the Lord's will be done!"

It was all in vain that the young men persisted in their benevolent efforts—in vain they attempted to convince him that the apparition of May Macivor, from first to last, was a delusion of his troubled brain:—the mind of Maccombich, naturally superstitious, was far too much excited at the time, and his imagination much too deeply impressed by his recent adventure, to admit of being influenced by sober reasoning, however plain or conclusive. "No, no, sir; no, no," he would still reply; "ye're very kind. God bless you, sir—ye're very kind—I dinna deserve it; ye're taking quite ow'r muckle trouble. But the truth is the truth—there's something at my heart that tells a sure tale. Doom canna alter, and it's no' my father's son that wud strive to shun his fate. Afore this day three months, that fellow an' me 'ill meet again—see if it be na so, an' she'll be there too, an' come else what may, it will be the last o' Duncan. But God's will be done, whatever that may be!"

"Melancholy and distressing that, now, is it not?" said Glenvallich, as the forester left them; "now would all the reason and philosophy of the schools, and all the persuasions of the ablest divines, be unavailing to convince that poor fellow

that he has not seen the *wraith* or *ghost* of that unhappy girl, which, like the Benshee, or attendant spirit, of many Highland families, has come to warn him of approaching fate. He is a Highlander every inch of him, superstition and all; and God knows to what fatal consequence this unlucky fancy may lead—it is truly vexatious.”

“It is all that,” replied Tresham; “but surely you don’t mean to imply that there is any thing much worse than a fit of the blue devils to be dreaded for poor Duncan. We must try to shake them off, and when the impression fades, the fit will pass away. I can’t imagine any thing further likely to happen, unless indeed this black scoundrel should take it in his head to turn bravo, and avenge his despoiled comrades by lying in wait and attacking poor Maccombich.”

“Why, faith, he seems quite a fellow for any such daring villainy, if there was aught to be got for it; but I don’t fear that. I think he must be sensible that the country is now too hot to hold him, and he will probably make himself scarce with all convenient speed. As for Maccombich, he is habitually too wary to be easily surprised. I am more apprehensive of the impression such a scene as that of to-day, viewed through the medium of a disordered imagination, may leave upon a mind naturally ardent, but tinged with superstitious gloom. But this is not the moment for combatting its influence—we must trust something to

the sedative effect of time, and I shall not lose sight of the poor fellow. In the mean time, we may as well rejoin our friends."

"Stay, here's something we may as well take a peep into," said Tresham, at that moment recollecting and producing the pocket-book and papers which he had found in the Slochd-uaine bothy. "Here's a sort of private booty I got hold of in the den of my old acquaintance—it may throw some light upon the concerns of the worthy fraternity."

"Hah! by my word, this may be a prize of value," said Glenvallich. "By all means let us see the contents before we are interrupted—they may not be just for public notice."

We shall not abuse our readers' patience by detailing the examination of this curious budget, although, to those engaged in it, it proved to be one of no small interest. Prepared, as they were, to discoveries of some consequence, they were confounded at the magnitude, the regular organization, and the extensive ramifications of the concern which the documents in their hands exposed. Letters and accounts were among them from agents in various towns, along with invoices, accounts of sale, and lists of regular and casual customers, as well as notes of sums due; and these lists included names that made them stare. There were notes of cargoes from the continent, and of returns from sundry places on the west coast of the Highlands,

shipped to different ports in France and Holland. There were specialties and bills, bearing the signatures of sundry individuals of whose names they knew nothing. But there were also among them documents affording proofs of the most complete and damnatory kind against several persons who had hitherto borne a fair character in the world, implicating them in the most positive manner with the smuggling fraternity of Glen Shlichard, as partners in their adventures, and sharers in their ill-got gains. And, chief among the names thus criminated, appeared that of Mr. Roderick Macaskill, of Ballytully.

It is unnecessary to particularize the undeniable evidence which clearly connected this worthy personage, not only with the Glen Shlichard men, and their chief, black Kenneth Dhoruv, but with the far more extensive coalition of which the Glen Shlichard concern was but an inconsiderable branch. We shall only observe, that it was conclusive as well as astounding to the minds of the two gentlemen who were conducting the examination.

“ I never, assuredly, did the laird of Ballytully the injustice of supposing him an honest man,” said Glenvallich, after he and his friend had gazed at each other for a while in no small amazement; “ but as certainly have I failed in giving him due credit for the large share of talent in roguery, and intrigue, and enterprise, which this

discovery fairly entitles him to. This, I own, surpasses my wildest flight of suspicion."

"Hum—why, the *enterprise*, the *spirit* of the thing, may perhaps be matter of surprise," said Tresham; "as for the roguery, I'm not prepared to say so much—it's a long time since I thought the laird of Ballytully about as dubious a character, in point of principle and honesty, as needed to be looked for."

"Ah, I know your opinion of him was even worse than mine; but, truth to say, Harry, I took it with some grains of allowance, as that of a rival, and therefore prejudiced a little."

"As that of a rival, Charles?—as how, pray—what do you mean?"

"Why, Harry, you surely don't mean to deny at this time of day that you are an admirer of Isabelle Stewart?—I am not apt to press my friends on such subjects, as you know; but I think I have heard you admit something very like this already."

"And suppose I confess it, what has that to do with this same Ballytully?"

"What?—you a lover, and want the first characteristic of the passion—jealousy?—But I understand: you would maintain your credit for disinterested candour in your opinion of Ballytully—that's all."

"Pshah—D—n the fellow!—but you don't mean—surely you can't mean to say, that the low-lived villain could presume?—and yet, by heaven,

the accursed fancy has more than once crossed my brain—but only—yes, only as connected with the laird's unaccountable toleration of the wretch. Yet the laird can't like him, surely; but what else could have encouraged the fellow? Poh! he never could think—never could imagine!—impudent as he is, he can't have been such an ideotical puppy. — Poh!—stuff—Glenvallich, you might have graced me with some more creditable rival.”

“ Well, I'm glad you take it so easily, Hal—but don't be too sure of the matter. If you have any serious thoughts in a certain quarter, let me advise you to lose no time in ascertaining your ground. If matters are as I suspect, you will not repent it—if I am mistaken, it is at all events best that you should know how you stand.”

“ But what is it you mean, then, Charles? or what do you suspect?—Don't be so oracular, man.”

“ Why, I mean just what I say, Harry—that a lover can't too soon know his mistress's mind—though I suspect Ballytully is hardly so far *ben* in the esteem of a certain fair one, as he may be in that of her father.”

“ Pshah, man! that were cold comfort, if it be all you can give me. Why, Isabelle dislikes Ballytully—absolutely dislikes him; I have seen it in a thousand instances: it is only consideration for her father's friend, and her own innate courtesy, that induces her to tolerate him at all. Egad, if

my chance were no better than his, it would not be much to boast of."

"Well, my dear Tresham, I have not the means of knowing what your chances may be, or how you may stand in the young lady's favour—only don't be too confident, even against a rival you may despise. I advise you to look sharp. I assure you the contingency I have hinted at has been more than talked of; I have even heard tell of some old infantine engagement, although it seems to have lain long dormant."

"Why, good God! you don't mean it—the thing is surely impossible!—an engagement when a child!—the old man could never have been so mad!—and to Ballytully? The miserable scoundrel! Are you sure of what you say, Charles? Who told you this? or what reason have you to believe it?—for God's sake be explicit!"

"Nay, indeed, I can't exactly tell—I have no very authentic grounds for believing the existence of the thing at all—it may be only gossip after all; yet the familiar footing on which Ballytully stands in the family, and the great intimacy of the uncle in Edinburgh with the old gentleman at Airdruthmore, do certainly in some measure countenance the report of the country. This is all I know, and all I can say; but if you are serious in your attentions to Miss Stewart, why not at once ascertain the true state of the case; if not, my dear Tresham excuse me, but as a friend,

I do think you have been quite long enough at Airdruthmore."

The countenance of Tresham assumed an expression of embarrassment and disquietude—the struggle of emotions in his mind was obviously painful, and it was some time before he could reply to Glenvallich's appeal. At length he spoke with an impressive earnestness which had its full effect upon his friend. "You are right, Charles; I feel the full justice of what you say; I see the need of deciding on my own line of conduct—indeed, I should say that it is already fixed. It would be as uncandid as absurd in me to deny my attachment to Miss Stewart—why, indeed, should I? It is one which any man might be proud to own. I have known her now for a considerable time: I have seen her in the privacy of domestic life, an advantage which few in my profession, and a stranger to boot, can boast of; and, in short, Charles, without descending to any foolish raptures, I know her to be a creature such as few men can hope to be blessed with—one whose heart would be a treasure worth all the gold of Mexico—whose angelic temper and admirable qualities must be a source of unfailing happiness and delight to him who shall be her husband. You may smile, Charles, but this is my firm opinion; and I will honestly tell you that were I assured that Isabelle Stewart would accept Harry Tresham as that husband, he would take her for better for

worse, as the choicest blessing he could receive. But in deciding on so important a step, there is much to be thought of; and strange as it may seem, Charles, after what I have said, there are considerations which have hitherto withheld me from a positive declaration of my sentiments."

"Well, Harry, I admire your candour, and am prepared to do as much for your prudence, when I am made acquainted with it. Your considerations, I pray—they should be strong ones to hold you at bay with one whose merits have called forth so *cool* and *dispassionate* an eulogium as you have this instant made. But suppose now, for an instant, that the young lady should be influenced by some such feelings for yourself—such coincidences have happened, you know—would it be quite fair to leave her so long in suspense? How do you know what *her* anxiety may be at this very moment, Harry?"

"Nay, Charles, I am not such a coxcomb as to speculate on any such possibility," said Tresham, and the blood which rushed into his face betokened the thrill which ran through his heart at the idea. "My apprehensions have been very different. At times, I confess that I had flattered myself with having made some progress in Isabelle's affections, but there are also moments when I have seen her so calm, so disengaged, so attentive to all around her, or so engrossed with devotion to her father, that I have doubted whether it was

possible she could ever participate in my feelings. I have felt that it would be madness to risk a refusal—that she never could be prevailed upon to quit her father in order to join a wanderer like me. And even suppose I had gained her love, Charles, you can understand how painful it must be for a man of proper feelings to see his wife reduced to live in a style of comfort inferior to that she has been accustomed to. Now, you know, my good fellow, that I am far from rich: my commission, and the money left me by my uncle,—about ten thousand pounds,—are all I have to trust to; and that, you must be aware, would never enable me to support Isabelle in decent comfort. Besides, I love my profession, and should not abandon it without regret, even were I able to do so: yet how could I think of dragging a creature like Isabelle about with me campaigning, or even subjecting her to the misery of the wretched quarters we soldiers are forced to put up with even in our own country? Giving me credit for as much imprudence as you please, you can hardly imagine me puppy enough to think my own merits a sufficient inducement for such a being as Isabelle Stewart—the idol of her father, and the flower of the whole country—to forsake her happy home, wander over the world with me, and take the run and chances of the service on five or six hundred a year—for whatever the estate may prove to the son, I shrewdly suspect the

good old laird lives too hospitably to leave much for his daughter. Indeed, whisperings of embarrassments have come to my ears even since I have been in the house. Now, what say you to all this, Charles? Hot-headed and thoughtless, as you have sometimes called me, you see I have some consideration in matters of moment. I hope, too, you will see cause to acquit me of selfishness at least."

"I do indeed, my dear Harry—I do indeed. Careless of your own interest—thoughtless regarding yourself, I have often said you were—but selfish, inconsiderate of the feelings of others, never: you have too much heart and good feeling yourself. I enter quite into your embarrassment, but what, after all, is the remedy?—what do you think of doing?"

"Faith, Charles, that is just what I can't tell. I have thought and thought about it, till my brain is weary, without arriving at any conclusion. The greatest length I ever reached was a resolution to discover Miss Stewart's sentiments; should they prove favourable, to enter into an engagement with her—wait a few years for the working of the chapter of chances, and my own luck in my profession, and at last, perhaps, when we can wait no longer, marry on the pittance I may then possess, and settle down as a half-pay captain or major, in a Highland farm, or some

country town in England, and vegetate away there like my own cabbage stocks. But, seriously, I am under great uneasiness on the subject."

"Well, my dear fellow, if it were to come to that, the best farm on the Glenvallich property should be yours at a very easy rent. But there is one thing you seem ignorant of, and which might help to stock your farm at least: Isabelle Stewart is not so entirely pennyless as you think—she has ten thousand pounds of her own, which her father has nothing to do with, and does not touch, further than that he may receive the interest for her. And let me tell you that with twenty thousand pounds between you, and your half-pay to boot, you might live like a prince in the Highlands, which you appear so fond of."

"Well, Charles, although I certainly am not the man to relish being beholden to my wife for a fortune, I am not quite Quixote enough to reject riches so thrust upon me, especially when tacked to such a wife as Isabelle Stewart. But before I could consent to benefit from this source, I should like to understand how the good old laird might be affected by such a defalcation of his income: I could not enjoy it if I thought he was to be put to inconvenience. But, after all, we are reckoning without our host; who can tell what Isabelle's feelings may be?"

"Ah, as to that, indeed, if *you* have not yet

arrived at a shrewd guess, you are further a-field than I think you ought to be; I can only repeat—feel your way—try your ground.”

“Aye, it must be done; but, at all events, I think this day’s work has rid me of my formidable rival; this doughty laird of Ballytully must be altogether out of question now, whatever may have been his audacious pretensions.”

“Yes, but I wish it may be altogether so easy a matter to cast him off. I have some misgivings upon that score. He has the devil’s own impudence, and has managed to get the old laird’s ear completely; even should no pledge have been given, still I dread some pecuniary entanglement. I wish he may not land Airdruthmore in some unlucky scrape before the game is played out. Besides, when he hears what we have been about, he will be desperate, and disposed, probably, to push matters to extremity for fear of some premature disclosure.”

“By heavens, Charles, you are right! I did not think of this; but I see it all. There’s no time to be lost; and he was at Airdruthmore when we left it! He may be at work with the old laird this moment—more mischief may be done in an hour than a lifetime can undo—every moment is precious. By Jove! I’ll be off at once. I don’t believe it’s more than twenty miles from hence, across the hill.”

“Whew! man! here’s a bustle and a fright

all at once :—patience, Harry, patience—twenty miles ! thirty good Highland miles, if it's a yard, and after such a day's fag—nay, after three of them running."

" Poh, man ! I'm fresh, quite fresh ; I could start now, by this fine moonlight, and never halt till I reached Airdruthmore."

" Ah, that's all lover's ravings—rank nonsense. We who keep our wits must look after you poor lunatics. To-morrow, indeed ——"

" Well, to-morrow morning early I'm off ; I can get a guide among your people, I suppose."

" O, plenty ; but for the present I should strongly recommend as sound a sleep as you can manage to get. And mind, Hal, when you do reach Airdruthmore, *prudence*, *courage*, and *decision*, are the words. Take my word for it, all will depend on yourself."

On the ensuing morning, long before the break of day, by the light of a brilliant moon, and accompanied by two stout and well-armed Highlanders, did Tresham start from Breulach, across the hilly region which intervened between that place and Strath Einort. But leaving him to pursue his way, which he did with all the ardour of a lover, and with a mind teeming with " thick coming fancies," we shall return to Airdruthmore, where events of no small importance to the interest of our narrative were then in the course of occurrence.

CHAPTER III.

A PEEP BEHIND THE CURTAIN—AND A PROPOSAL

Out of my sight ! thou dost infect mine eyes !

WE left the party at Airdruthmore reduced in spirits as well as in numbers ; and one of the ladies, at least, suffering no small anxiety regarding the welfare of those friends whose sudden retreat had not only surprised but alarmed her.—It was in vain that Isabelle Stewart sought to stifle her apprehensions by adverting to the acknowledged prudence of Glenvallich. There was, she conceived, a mystery in the conduct both of himself and his friend, which baffled her penetration, but which she involuntarily connected in one shape or other with the late unpleasant occurrence at Elsie's cottage.

To communicate her apprehensions to her friend, Miss Tresham, would, she felt, be equally useless and cruel, as that young lady, while she would

necessarily partake largely of an uneasiness which as yet she had been spared, could in no degree aid in relieving their mutual disquietude; and the heart of Isabelle was not so selfish as to seek relief in the mere participation of distress, while her delicacy shrunk from the possibility of betraying sentiments, which she scarcely felt justified in entertaining for one, who as yet had never explicitly declared his own. Thus she bore in secret a load of doubt which was the more painful, because confined to her own bosom.

It was the fourth day after the departure of the gentlemen, before her anxiety experienced any diminution; and then it was partially relieved by reports of the purposed hunting match on Glenvallich's estate, which at that time reached Airdruthmore.

On the evening of the sixth day, the laird of Ballytully, who arrived to dinner, confirmed the truth of these reports, and added many particulars of the success of the sportsmen, which proved him to be well informed on the subject. The cheer of that gentleman was more sober than usual; and his manner was marked by an awkward approach to timidity, by no means characteristic of his ordinary demeanor.—Little did the fair Isabelle divine the cause of so palpable an improvement—little did she dream how deeply she was herself concerned in it!

Business of a pressing nature had summoned

the laird of Airdruthmore abroad, at an early hour on the succeeding day: and the clear, bracing, frosty air, and brilliant sunshine, tempted the ladies to a long forenoon walk. In this, the gallant Ballytully made several urgent demonstrations of joining them; but they evinced so little disposition to accept of his services, and manœuvred so successfully—as ladies well know how to do—to stave him off without absolutely affronting him by a downright refusal, that the mortified beau was forced to retire from the attack, and trust to his own resources for the forenoon's amusement.

That this worthy personage had something more than common upon his mind, might have been obvious enough, had any of the party taken pains to observe him; but as the reader may be more curious than they were, and as we make it a principle to satisfy all reasonable curiosity, particularly when it falls in with our own more important arrangements, we shall proceed to detail certain particulars which may furnish forth the required information.

The laird of Ballytully subsequent to the arrangement of his various business and engagements, which, whatever they were, occupied him during a large part of the autumn and the early part of winter—had, immediately previous to his last appearance at Airdruthmore, passed some time with his uncle Thomas in the Caledonian metropolis.

The greeting which that worthy gentleman bestowed upon his nephew, though affectionate as usual, was marked with unusual gravity, and the tone of his spirits were so much lower than customary, that the young man could not avoid remarking it to his relative. The observation appeared to recall that relative to himself.—“ Who? —I?” replied the man of law, “ I low-spirited—never more out in your life, Rory!—No, no, ye’ll never see me mounting suddenly up, and falling foolishly low, my lad—*æquam memento*, as old Horace says—for I’m not without my cares, man—who is?—who is?—Aye, faith, lad,” continued the uncle, as if the annoyance which was working within him had been uncorked by his nephew’s remark, and insisted upon forcing way,—“ and I must say that some of them, and these not the least, have no little to do with yourself.”

“ Who? I, uncle?—with me?—and as how I pray?”

“ Why, Rory, man, I must tell ye that plainly, ye see; an’ it will not take many words neither. I must e’en say that I’m no just easy about all these Highland trokeries and work. I’m fear’d they’re all *has-beens*—the profits gone and the risk remaining. De’il a much good hae I seen o’ them these five years back. And yet the trade was a good one once.—There was Airchy Whither-shins made weel by it—an’ keepit the gear too—and there was Mactaggart o’ Greenock had grip-pet a good pose, if he hadna lost all by that d—d

brig o' his.—Aye it was a good business once, de'il a doubt. But then there's ow'r muckle of the foreign trade's creepit in—and that's a thrawart wark that no man can control. The chield in Holland may be a gude fellow eneugh—staunch eneugh:—but it's aye a maxim in sic like dealings to take wi' the one hand and deliver wi' the other—cash in hand, or goods in hand, and as little trust as ye like—and trade like that never breaks squares or friendships. Long accounts short friends, they say. Now in the foreign trade, how are ye to keep from trusting? ye canna help yeresel'. Ye ken that, Rory,—none better;—and ye canna be aye skelping ow'r to France and Holland as ye did the year at the risk o' being clappit up in Verdun, or some o' the out-o'-the-way far-off depôts.”

“Faith, sir, all you have said is true, but then the *returns* are so good.”

“Aye, lad,—good when ye finger them: but let me see what ye have to show for the last big lump o' an outlay;—or even for the twa last cargoes from the West coast. The never a word, that I have heard, at least, have ye got of their proceeds.”

“But we shall, sir—we shall—they talked of excellent prices.”

“Aye, there ye are again—*talked*—what signifies talking? No, but that the trade's a good trade when it cuts in wi' other wark, and ye

make a barter o' it, but out o' naithing, naithing comes, ye ken. And see ye, Rory, that ye dinna lippen ow'r much to that black Hieland rascal. He's a sad louter yon—a greater scoundrel there is na this day unhung, atween this and John o' Groat's house; though if he's true to you and does his work weel, that's neither here nor there. Saul and body, man, but he has a hantle in his power, tho'—it's kittle work when ye maun trust sae muckle to the dirk an' the tartan!"

"Well sir, I do believe the fellow is honest—it's his interest to be so; he knows what I have against him, if he were to play me false: all I can do, is to look sharp after him. There will be a good deal to do one way or other this year, they say—a brisk demand, and large orders, it is said. It's true there's too much outstanding; but I hope we shall come tumbling in—brought up with a wet finger, as they say. But how come your own concerns on, sir?"

"Hum—well, I hope—well, to be sure—ye have heard no soughs to the contrar?—no foolish talk?"

"O no, sir, not a syllable. But there is some report of a fall in wool, and oak bark; and it's said there will be a large importation of corn admitted, in order to lower the price of bread for the poor, who are roarin out at the exorbitant rate it sells at."

“Aye, curse them—so they are—so they do; and things are falling in spite of all our manœuvres; we can’t keep up prices as we used to do, and as should be the case. And faith there’s two or three of my specs, that dont promise so weel as I could wish. There’s that kelp affair; this confounded barilla will ding it down four pounds a ton; and the wood of Glen Fintra, that should have all been at market before now, that lazy chield Macinlay has keepit it back sa long, that bark’s down too. De’il hae me but I’m thinking he’s had his own gude reasons for the delay; but I hae him weel in hand; the labour’s a’ to pay yet: and the laird will neither take it off my hands, nor gie time—but I may gie him a cast yet too. But these are trifles—trifles no’ worth speakin’ o’,” continued the W. S. passing his hand over his brow, as if to brush away the tell-tale wrinkles, which care was fast imprinting there, and which told their story in spite of his admirable self-possession.

“What are things like these to—but I wish—I wish we could, that is—By the bye, Rory, how stand you of late at Airdruthmore?—How looks the fair Isabelle on you? Here’s her health, my boy, in a bumper. I say—when are we to call her Mrs. Macaskill, eh?”

“Why, faith, sir, that’s a question I can hardly answer—you know I’ve been but little at Airdruthmore this summer—that stir in the trade kept me so much abroad. Isabelle and I were on

the usual terms—civil, quite civil; but there was nothing that tempted me to precipitate matters. On the contrary, when I was there last there came a young fellow—Tresham, I think his name was, an Englishman—an officer too—as fine and as high as a lord. Confound the puppy!—I hate him like a brock or a foumart; and there he stuck like a leech, while I was forced to trot;—and by heaven! the girl seemed to eye the fellow just kindly enough. He’s a smooth-faced, oily-tongued chap, and the Lord knows what mischief he may have done all this time. When the cat’s away, ye know—but the cat may be on them sooner than they’re thinking for.”

“Aye, Rory, but suppose the cat were to meet with her match. Saul and body, man! she’s been just long eneugh away by yere own account; ye ha’na any time to lose. So be off at once, man; press matters home, and if they dinna go on briskly, it’s time for me to open my battery; for troth, it wouldna please me to see much more delay. I’m getting ould now; I want to see things squared and roundit in, afore I’m gathered to my fathers; an’ if I dinna see it, Rory, I’m feared ye never will, lad—for ye haena the gripping airt. *Catch* was a gude dorey, they say, but *Haudfast* was a better; ye may have the *getting*, but ye want the keeping talent.

“But, Rory, lad, the thing must not be let sleep; the ould man’s safe noo—his head’s under

my belt; he canna say ‘no,’ if he would, when I say ‘aye;’ an’ the girl winna cheep against his word when she kens that her own word will save or ruin him. As for this English chap, this Tresham, we must take order wi’ him; he belongs to the army it seems—couldn’t we find means to get him sent off to his regiment? We must see about this—we’ll find out his agents. But be ye off to Strath Einort, man—lay close siege there, and bring the garrison to terms without delay; there’s more depends on this, maybe, than ye ken of.”

“Faith it’s time the articles were ‘signed, sealed, and delivered,’ fast and firm; an’ that’s the truth on’t.” Thus mused the worthy W. S., when his nephew had left the room; “I want the *money*—I need the cash—and if I don’t finger it soon, there’s no saying. A bad business was that last purchase—and the mortgage to be so soon called up too:—confoundedly unlucky! As for the wood, it was a fair take in—on a falling market too. And these cursed speculations! De’il’s in them, an’ in me too, I think,—what had I to do, meddling wi’ them? Aye—too much at risk, too many irons in the fire—too much paper afloat—must draw in—must wind up and limit my dealings. But to do so without cash—there’s the difficulty. Saul and body! I must have the *gelt*—we must see to manage Rory, and that won’t be easy; ‘cute chield—won’t relish my fingering the cash—wants it himself—but must contrive to manage

him. Confound it—I'm fear't he's gone wrong wi' these Hieland caterans—not quite at the bottom of that work—must go see myself."

"Keen old fox, that uncle of mine!" muttered the affectionate nephew, as he moved away from the presence of his relative. "I know what he would be at as well as himself. If Isabelle's money were once to get into his clutches, I wonder how many baubees would come my way. I know *his* way of making up accounts. Surely the old sneekdrawer does not suppose me blind to *his* motives for pushing that marriage? Can't be such a fool—can't think me such a greenhorn. I suspect the old boy's embarrassments are greater than are supposed. I know some of his late specs in land can't pay two per cent.; and his loss in wood and kelp is not the trifle he would have me suppose. But he must be rich, after all—must cut up well—that wadsett alone was a capital thing—a grand catch. Yes, yes; the girl I must have—that wadsett will be tacked to her petticoat-tail at all events; and let me alone to throw dust in the eyes of uncle Tom. But, faith, my own affairs begin to press me cursedly. That confounded cutter!—and then the smash at Glasgow!—and faith, for all my good face before the old one, I wish that black rascal may be dealing fair with me. I have been too much out of the way lately. But Paterson would surely peach if the other went far wrong; he's as jealous of the other as the cat

of a strange dog. After all, it's a confounded awkward business. I'm too deep in—I wish my name had been less used—cursed folly it was to sign these bills—and yet the d—d Dutchman was so stiff. By Jove, I must watch them all more closely. Then this Tresham; confound the meddling rascal—how I hate the vermin! and he seems to know more of me than I like. Aye; I can read in his eye that he has his suspicions. Yet, what can he know! But he must be disposed of; that's certain—how? that's the difficulty. That girl likes him too, I am sure of it. The very stolen glance of her eye, as she looks at him askance, is enough to tell it. And as for him—pah!—how he gloats and languishes; my blood boils at him! but have a care, my lad, I may spoil your sport yet. Well, well—the first thing we have to do, at all events, is to get to the ground.”

On the second day after this interview, the laird of Ballytully was ready for his journey northwards.

“Mind, Rory, lad, when ye get yonder now,” said the prudent uncle, on taking leave of his hopeful nephew, “mind and set your best foot foremost. We must have no more shilly-shally work; ye must bring the old boy to his categories, and the girl to her blushes and her senses. But put off that d—d impudent way ye sometimes have, and be as douce as a minister. Bluster won't do with these high-flown dames. Ye'll soon find how

the land lies, and if ye want a lift, just tip me a missive, an' I'll supply ye wi' a reply and rejoinder in a jiffy. Let me alone for bringing them both to their senses—aye, on their marrow-bones; they *dare* not anger me. As for the Englishman, he may find himself one too many, where he has howffed so long; and besides, he's too poor to interfere; his hands are tied; I've ascertained that. So now, my boy, good bye, and good luck t'ye."

Thus schooled, Ballytully took his departure; and, as we have seen, reached Airdruthmore just at the time when Glenvallich had resolved to proceed against the smugglers. The tone of that gentleman's conversation at Airdruthmore had alarmed Ballytully exceedingly. He felt not only that danger impended over the concern in general, but had a sort of awkward foreboding, that he might individually come in for some unlucky hit. Conscience-stricken, he looked upon himself as already a suspected person, and cowered under the eyes of those whom he considered as his probable detectors. But his alarm only exacerbated his hatred, and he swore to take prompt measures for defeating, or revenging, whatever attempts might be directed against his confederates or himself.

The sudden and unexpected departure of the two principal objects of his suspicion completed the uneasiness and confusion of Ballytully, who, as we have already seen, also quitted Airdruthmore, leaving the main object of his visit unat-

tempted, in his anxiety to baffle, if it might be possible, the apprehended arrangements against his nefarious colleagues—not from any solicitude about their safety, but his own; not to prevent their loss, but his own individual ruin.

The course which he took upon leaving Airdruthmore has not been precisely ascertained, any more than the manner in which he disposed of his time for the succeeding four or five days. His return to that place indicated that his immediate alarm was abated; but that some uneasiness still remained was equally obvious, from the cloud which still hung upon his brow.

But alarm for the future was not the only cause of that uneasiness which darkened the countenance of the laird of Ballytully. A curious observer might have noted much of that awkward timidity, that uncouth shyness, which so painfully oppresses the naturally bold and insolent, in the presence of superior intellect and superior breeding—the pledge of that ascendancy which beauty and virtue, and innate nobility of soul, never fail to exert over sordid vice, and conscious worthlessness. It was a faithful type of the truth; for while Ballytully, keenly sensible of the importance of propping his falling character by a connexion with respectability and worth, had actually come to the resolution of completing his long-projected scheme, and laying himself and all his possessions at the feet of Isabelle Stewart, the self-sufficiency

and impudence—the “armour in which he trusted,” failed him at the pinch, and he remained silent and abashed, gazing with troubled soul and louring eye upon the lovely form of her whom he had dared to consider as already almost his property.

It was in hopes of finding a fitting opportunity to make his important disclosure, that Mr. Macaskill had made so urgent an attempt to accompany the ladies in their walk. But his hardihood had failed in pressing the proposal against their playful refusals. Baffled in this hope, he roamed about in solitude, meditating upon the impending and most uncongenial enterprise in which he was about to engage, and mustering up his courage, and his eloquence for the encounter. It is seldom that such meditations, however natural they may be, improve the self-possession or coolness of the party concerned. And most people, who have been in situations of this description, will, we feel confident, agree with us in thinking, that the more unpremeditated and unexpected such *eclaircissements* are, the more satisfactory do they prove, and the more eloquent do the pleaders find themselves.

That the laird of Ballytully would have afforded an additional proof of the justice of this remark, we have little doubt, had the meditative process continued uninterrupted. But such was not the case; for it was observed, that while wandering restlessly among the farms upon the *Aird*, he was

accosted by a ragged-looking *prochach*, whose bare legs bore the stains of long travel, and the scratches and bruises of many a rugged thicket. The sudden start of the laird when he saw the boy, and the violent gestures he made as the interview proceeded, were remarked by certain of the servants, who subsequently mentioned the circumstance : in a little while, however, leading the way to a neighbouring thicket, both laird and lad were hid from further view.

As evening fell, Ballytully returned, and going to the stables gave some orders to his servants, before entering the house. The ladies, he was informed, had returned from their walk ; but the laird of Airdruthmore had not yet made his appearance. Ringing for a servant, he sent a message to Miss Stewart, requesting to be favoured with an interview. The very ring of the bell had a sound of desperation in it ; and the servant was so much struck with its peculiarity, that he could not help staring at the laird as he answered the summons. The perturbation of his countenance and air, as seen even by the imperfect light of the hour, was so perceptible, that the man, in delivering his message to his mistress, could not avoid adding, that “ he wished a’ nicht be weel—the laird leuked very strange like.”

The first idea that occurred to Isabelle, was that some misfortune had happened to Tresham, and a cold shudder pervaded her frame, as she

rose to obey the summons. But in another moment, the lengthened absence of her father forced itself upon her recollection, and the thrill of alarm which succeeded was accompanied by a burning blush, at the consciousness of how intimately the image of the young Englishman must be interwoven with her thoughts, when it was the first that suggested itself connected with the idea of danger. With a mingled emotion of terror and of shame, she hastened to the room where Ballytully awaited her approach, pacing the room with steps so disorderly as strongly to confirm her fears.

The blush had not yet faded from her countenance when she hastily entered, and casting her eyes upon his face, her alarm was completed by the disordered expression which she saw there.

“O Mr. Macaskill!” she exclaimed, “what has happened? tell me, pray tell me? what is it? what of my father?”

“Your father, Miss Stewart! why—what about him?” replied Ballytully, surprised and staring in his turn.

“Ah—haven’t you?—that is—I thought—I feared you had some bad news—something about my father.”

“Bad news about your father? not I, Miss Stewart; what made you suppose so? I have not seen the laird since last night. I hope there’s nothing wrong?”

“ Nothing, assuredly, that I know of, Mr Macaskill. It was your own manner—your singular request; and the servant said you were agitated. But perhaps it was of some other friend. Has Glenvallich?—has—has Mr. Tresham —?”

“ No, no, Miss Stewart,” replied Ballytully, with a tone and gesture of great impatience; “ I know nothing of either—I have no bad news—I only—it was not of others—it was not of others; it was of yourself—of myself, I mean; it was on a very different matter, with a very different object, that I requested this honour.”

“ Of *me*—of *yourself*, Mr. Macaskill?” repeated Isabelle, gazing at him with unrepressed surprise, and utterly at a loss to comprehend what he would be at. “ What can you mean?—what possible subject, connected with me, can have occasioned this agitation? I am sure there is something wrong—better wait till my father returns, he will be able to give you suitable advice—I can do nothing, certainly.”

“ No, no, Miss Stewart—Miss Isabelle—my dear Miss Isabelle—let me call you so;—can you not guess? Can you not imagine? Do you not understand the cause of my agitation?—It is you, and you only, that can relieve it. I want no advice—no consultation—nothing but your good will—nothing but your love, dear Miss Stewart. I have long loved you, long adored you; nothing but circumstances of an imperative nature have

kept me so long silent ; and now, when fate allows me to speak out, do not, dear Miss, do not disappoint my hopes—say that you will be mine—say that I am to be happy !”

The unmingled and uncontrollable astonishment which, during the first part of this harangue, had sealed the lips of Isabelle, by degrees yielded to a crowd of other emotions as she gazed upon the kneeling figure before her ; for Ballytully, who interpreted in the most favourable manner for himself, the patience with which she had listened to him, and who recollected something about the propriety of kneeling before the object of his adoration, had thrown himself upon one knee. Dislike, disgust, disdain, contempt, ridicule, might each in turn have been remarked as they flitted over her countenance, altering its expression as summer clouds change the features of a bright landscape into an infinite variety of hue and form ; and had the selfish being who lay at her feet but studied the feelings of the mind which was reflected in that fair countenance, he might have saved himself the trouble of pressing his suit, and the pain of a decided repulse.

Indignation and wounded delicacy would have prompted a severe reply ; but in the bosom of Isabelle Stewart emotions so harsh could have but a momentary duration. “ He is my father’s friend—his guest ; poor creature, he means well, no doubt. Abject and disgusting as he seems, he

intends this as a compliment." Such were the reflections which succeeded her first stormy impulses, and tranquillized her countenance as they subdued her anger. "Rise, Mr. Macaskill," said she at last, in a calm steady tone, and with a self-possession which would have been death to an ardent and sensitive lover—"rise from that unbecoming posture; rise for your own sake, as well as mine. Sorry am I that any degree of astonishment on my part, at your most unexpected address, should have tended to prolong your continuance in it a moment; and still more do I regret that so extraordinary a conduct on your part should have exposed either of us to so painful and humiliating a scene.

"If I at all comprehend your meaning, sir, I have only to observe, that I am totally at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct can have provoked such an address from you. I have received you, sir, in this house, as my father's friend; and so long as he continues that friendship, and you are pleased to observe towards me the respect which is due to his daughter, so long am I content to receive you here, and treat you with courtesy. When this ceases on your part, our acquaintance must terminate; and I am certain that no longer would my dear father insist on my continuing it."

Miss Stewart having said this, with a slight obeisance was preparing to leave the room, when Ballytully, recovering a little from the confusion

into which her grave rebuke had thrown him, rose to prevent her. "Stay, Miss Isabelle—stay, Miss Stewart; stop, I entreat you, and listen to me. You don't surely mean to say that you were ignorant till now of the hopes I have so long, perhaps so presumptuously, entertained? You cannot but be aware that for years—many years past, I have not only looked forward with hope to the event I have this day ventured to allude to in your presence, but have been encouraged in that hope by those who surely had a right to do so."

"Mr. Macaskill!—you confound and perplex me! I cannot guess at what you mean. What event, what hope, what hope, what right you allude to, or who is to exercise it, I am utterly at a loss to conceive. Your whole conduct and conversation is a mystery to me; and your behaviour, I must say it, little short of an insult, to which you will excuse me, if I expose myself no longer."

"Nay, stay, madam—fear no insult from me. Believe me, my desire is rather to protect than insult you; but listen, I entreat you, to one more question—excuse my plainness. Has your father never informed you that for many years past—from a very early age, indeed, on your part, there has existed a wish, in fact, an understanding on the part of my uncle and your father, to promote a union at some future period between yourself and me?"

"A union between you and me, sir?" said Isa-

belle, with a lip of scorn and an eye of fire, which she cared not to repress as she drew up her fine figure to its loftiest proportions. "No, sir—never!—never have I heard one word of this singular and incredible conspiracy from any but yourself. My father!—it is a slander which he will know how to appreciate and repel: he never conceived such an injustice against his child, and that child will never injure him so far as to credit it of him.—Let me go, sir; I will no longer remain, nor listen to a language which is equally insulting and unintelligible to me."

"Beware, Miss Stewart!—I warn you to beware!" replied Ballytully, with a lowering brow; "you know not on what ground you are treading. You may repent this haughtiness---this contempt. Listen to me calmly. It is no story of my own invention, as you will soon learn; it is——"

"How, sir?—Do you threaten me? and in this place?—Away, sir—I remain not a moment longer. Carry your threats and your insults elsewhere; they will not be tolerated here, believe me." And with these words Isabelle, with a dignity which awed the angry Ballytully, in spite of himself, into silence, moved steadily to the door, and left the room.

Fierce was the wrath, and furious the torrent of invective, which burst from the baffled Ballytully when he recovered from the confusion in which he had been left by his retreating mistress. Deeply

did he swear that he would be revenged—that he would make her repent of her contemptuous haughtiness—that she should be his, in spite of her pride and the very teeth of all her kith and kin—that she should be made to know the folly of her conduct, and sue for pardon at the feet of him she had despised. In this gloomy and ferocious mood did he continue, nursing his wrath, until the sound of horses' feet announced the return of the master of the mansion, who, ignorant of the storm which raged within his walls, had thrown off mantle and boots, and entered the drawing-room with his customary cheerful step and smile. The room was empty—"Where is my daughter?" was his question to the servant.

"In her own room, sir," was the reply.

"And Miss Tresham?"

"In her own room too, sir."

"Hum!—and Ballytully?"

"Ou, I'm thinking he's in the parlour, sir."

"Hey! what the devil?—any thing the matter? Isn't it time they should all be here? What are ye looking at, man? What is the matter?"

"Ou, your honour, I dinna ken; I'm thinking the laird o' Ballytully's no' just the thing, sir, but I canna tell what ails him. He sought to see Miss Eezibelle, an' she went off till her room, an' has na been out since; but, may be, it's nothing, sir."

"Well, well, I suppose it's not long till dinner, and then we shall hear all about it."

“ My daughter off to her room, and Ballytully discomposed !” muttered the laird, as he walked about the room ruminating on what he had heard. “ What can it mean !—poh !—some nonsense of that fellow’s, I suppose—the girls are tired with their walk, I dare say.”

“ The laird of Ballytully’s compliments, and begs to see your honour in the parlour,” said the servant, re-entering.

“ What the deuce is in the wind now ?” said the laird somewhat peevishly. But as he followed the servant to the parlour door, a secret dread shot through his soul like a presentiment of evil. He had no time, however, for analyzing his feelings ; for in another moment the door opened, and he found himself in the presence of the laird of Ballytully.

That gentleman, who was still pacing the apartment with a hurried step that betrayed the disturbance of his mind, stopped as his host entered ; and going up to him, presented his hand with some common-place compliment. “ Why, what the devil ails you, man ?” asked the laird, as the servant, after casting an inquisitive look round the room, retired and shut the door. “ What’s the matter with ye all ?—what have you and my daughter been after ? that *ye* look so glum, and that *she’s* taken to her room ?—ye hav’n’t been quarrelling, I hope ?”

“ And *I* hope, Airdruthmore,” said Ballytully,

evidently trying to master his feelings, “ that the respect I entertain for yourself, as well as for your charming daughter, will always prevent such a misfortune on my part. But certainly I have had the honour of an interview with Miss Stewart, which has come to a very different result from what I looked for; and it is on this very subject that I craved to see you now.

“ Ye know, Airdruthmore, how anxiously my good uncle Thomas, and your fast friend, has desired to see the good will which has so long been between our families, cemented by some substantial connexion. Often has he, worthy man, spoken on the subject with an earnestness that brought the tears into his eyes.—‘ If ye would ever have my favour, Roderick,’ he would say to me, ‘ cultivate the friendship of the kind and worthy laird of Airdruthmore; and if there is a wish nearer my heart than another, it is to see the connexion which we have so often projected take place—to see you, Rory, the husband of his daughter——’ ”

“ Well, but”—interrupted the old gentleman, or rather *tried* to interrupt, for his attempt proved abortive against the persevering and unusual eloquence of his younger opponent, who instantly struck in with—

“ I pray you give me leave awhile, my good sir. These were my uncle’s own words, a hundred, nay, a thousand times repeated; and God knows how anxiously I have desired to make them good.

Pardon me yet awhile I pray you. You have now known me for many years; and, I trust, have not known any thing to my prejudice. Excuse me, my worthy sir—I know what you would say; I am thankful to you for your good opinion; but pray hear me out. Ever since I retired from the service, and returned to my own country, I have made it my study to render myself agreeable to you, my dear sir, and worthy of your lovely daughter. Nay, spare me, I pray. Since the time of Miss Isabelle's arrival in this house, I have unremittingly pursued the same object, by the same means. I have studied to make myself agreeable to Miss Stewart; and from her general behaviour towards me, I have had reason to believe I had succeeded. Native bashfulness, and the completion of certain arrangements which I can afterwards explain, have alone prevented me hitherto from speaking out my mind to the object of my sole and ardent affections. But at length, having, as I hoped, overcome all obstacles, and mustered up resolution sufficient for so interesting a purpose—secure as I knew myself to be of her father's good wishes—I pray you hear me to an end—and reasonably confident, from all previous appearances, of a favourable reception in the most important quarter;—having thus, I say, prepared the way, I resolved to be no longer silent, but to declare my hopes—nay, my claims to favour. Judge then, my dear sir—judge of my anguish and disappointment, when I tell

you, that having this day sought and obtained an audience, and having begun to urge my suit with all the frank openness which, I will be bold to say, belongs to my character;—instead of meeting with that favourable consideration which I humbly conceived to be my due, I was stopped in the very outset by expressions of astonishment—all knowledge of my previous intentions was disclaimed,—my pretensions derided, your favourable opinion questioned, and the conference abruptly broken up with contemptuous defiance! I appeal to your candour, my dear sir, to say whether I have not cause, ample cause of mortification and discomposure—and I call upon your justice to set these matters to rights, which you yourself have had so great a share in originating.”

Fairly run down and overwhelmed by the consequential torrent of Ballytully’s eloquence—an eloquence prepared for the nonce, by one who knew his man—stopped in every attempt at offering either denial or explanation, the good laird of Airdruthmore, was for a few minutes too much bewildered to reply. Even when he did recollect his scattered senses, and began to consider the real merits of the case—when his natural good sense and good feeling began to revolt at the gross and glaring interference which had been attempted with his parental privileges, his kindness and habitual good will towards his guest softened down the rising displeasure, and he scarcely thought of

any thing but soothing the irritated feelings of one whom he still liked, and who he supposed had at all events suffered pain if not evil treatment under his roof.

“My good friend Ballytully,” said he at last, “I beg you to be composed; be assured that I am sensible of your worth, and feel for your disappointment. If you have suffered any wrong in this house, I will readily do my best to remedy it;—but I cannot think that Isabelle can be in fault. It is not in her nature, dear child!—it is not in her nature; you are wrong in this matter, my good friend—you must be so.”

“Wrong, Airdruthmore? How can you say so, when I tell you what passed? Have I not been refused—insulted?—and after the most sacred promises of a contrary reception?”

“Stay, stay, my good friend—have patience. It is very true that your uncle, my good friend Tom, has more than once hinted at the connexion you propose, and he may have been led to suppose that I wished it also. For I did love your uncle, Ballytully, and I do so still, warmly. And had it pleased God that Belle should fancy you, I’m sure I should have readily given my consent. But whatever I may have said, or rather whatever he may have *supposed me to say*, take my word for it, I never dreamt or thought of *forcing* Isabelle’s inclinations.”

“But, my good sir, how does this square with

all that has passed on this subject, between my uncle Tom and you? and with the numerous negotiations and arrangements that have been formed upon the faith of this connexion?"

"Why, Ballytully, you seem better informed on the subject than myself; but I neither know the promises, the negotiations, nor the arrangements to which you allude. To the best of my remembrance I was party to nothing of the sort."

"Why, certainly, sir, I can't tell you precisely in what forms or terms they were given; but you must be aware, Airdruthmore, of the fact. Surely you know that much of the accommodation you have received from my uncle Thomas was afforded solely upon the implied understanding of a future connexion between the families, which rendered strictness in business of less consequence; and assuredly Isabelle was brought up in the knowledge of this prospective connexion?"

"Why, Ballytully, as to the accommodation I have received from your uncle, if ye mean money for money's worth, or on bill, or bond, or credit, I'm free to confess my obligations to his friendship, in all ways as well as in this; and I don't think he is the man to throw any thing of the sort in my teeth, far less to think of forcing me or my daughter into a connexion, be it what it may, that does not suit her feelings. But I'm thinking that whatever he may have furnished me with, he has had the worth of it from me, or he's safe for it,

and that's all one. As to Isabelle, I may as well tell you the whole out at once: it's God's truth, that since she was a mere bairn, may be I never spoke to her a word good or bad about what ye are speaking of, nor ever gave her cause to think that she was evened to any man, far less fore-spoken. And further, since we are on the subject, an' ye want to ken my mind," continued the laird, warming as he went on, "I must say, that never will I be the father to force my puir lassie into a match that she does na approve—nor to take as the husband of her bosom the man she canna like. Poor sweet lassie, dear, dear did she cost me, and as dearly do I love her—for the sake of her that's a saint in heaven, if it were na for her own, never shall her father be the one to cause her sorrow. No, no, Ballytully, ye have my full mind out; win Isabelle's consent, and ye hae mine; without it, never think to make a tyrant of me to force the poor girl against her will and conscience."

And is this your answer, Airdruthmore? Is this all the consideration my uncle and myself are to look for from you?"

"Indeed, Ballytully, I think it is quite as much as you or any man can look for, lad; and as much, I'm sure, as my friend Tom would expect from me in the circumstances, I see no further obligation I'm under on this subject, and I don't take it well, I assure you, to have it hinted that any such exists."

“ In that case, sir, I have my answer, which I shall faithfully report to my uncle. But reflect, sir, I beg of you—a breach with my uncle will be at least unpleasant, and may be dangerous.”

“ It would be most unpleasant to me assuredly, Ballytully—as to the danger, that’s another story : allow me to say, such a word does na sound well from you ; but I’m not afraid of a quarrel with him—it’s only *you*, my hot-headed young friend, that seem disposed that way. Come, come, now, clear your brow, man ; make your peace with Isabelle—please her if you can—if not, why, bear it like a man, and never think of forcing a poor lassie to what her heart does not give her to.”

“ Excuse me, sir, I hope for better assistance from you—you will think further of this matter I’m persuaded. There are concerns between my uncle and yourself, which I’m well assured would suffer by a rupture ; but if this alliance were once concluded, I have no doubt all might be comfortably arranged.”

“ Why, what the de’il, sir, would ye have me include my daughter in a settlement of accounts, or a writer’s bill o’ costs ? or what ? ” said the old man, reddening a little with rising indignation ; “ but no, no, ye dinna mean that—it was a hasty word—ye’re angry, an ye’ll cool by-and-bye—come man, come, there’s nothing worse for anger than fasting—dinner’s near ready, I’m sure—we’ll all meet in the dining-room, so away with all clouds

and be cheerful. What ! how the deevil could ye expect to please Isabelle with such a black face as that ?” At this moment a servant entered with a request from Miss Stewart that she might see her father as soon as convenient in her own room. “ Well, I’m coming,” said the old gentleman, “ so get yourself ready, man, and I’ll see and sort Isabelle, so that ye may meet good friends at least ;” and with these words he left the laird o’ Ballytully, and proceeded to his daughter’s apartment.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPLANATIONS—AN ARRIVAL.

—O look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.

WHEN Isabelle left the room after her conference with Ballytully, she took refuge in her own chamber, where the indignant feelings, which had supported her through the short but vexatious scene, and had enabled her to terminate it so abruptly, very soon subsided, and gave way to a rush of mingled emotions which would have baffled all attempts to analyze. Tears are the natural relief of the surcharged and agitated female bosom ; but it would have been no easy matter to determine the exact source from whence those now shed by Isabelle flowed ; certainly not in consequence of any threat or insult of the despicable being whom she had just left to his own reflections, although her cheek glowed and her bosom swelled at his

insolence, cloked though it was with a flimsy garb of humility. Excited as her apprehensions had been for the safety of those she loved, and still influenced by a dubious foreboding of danger to one, whom she could not disguise it from herself had obtained a powerful interest in her heart, and whose fate appeared to be so mysteriously connected with her own, she was ill-prepared for so unlooked-for and revolting an address as that which she had encountered from the lips of Ballytully—a person whom she had never either liked or esteemed. It might be unfair perhaps to examine too curiously into the complicated workings of the human heart; but may we not in all candour imagine the coarse disgusting form of her kneeling suitor to have been mentally contrasted by his fair mistress with that of one who, had he appeared in that place, might have sued with better hope of success? Assuredly a deep, perhaps till now a scarce acknowledged sense of disappointment, added bitterness to the mortification she had just received, and threw a light upon her own feelings which pained and startled her. The blush which deepened on her brow was excited by shame and by regret; but after a short and painful struggle, the well-regulated mind of Isabelle resumed its strength, and she resolved that no unguarded look or word should betray to others the power that had been gained over a heart, by one who seemed scarcely to value the prize. By

degrees the agitation of her mind subsided, and she was soon able to review with calmness all that had passed, and to consider and arrange for the future.

Upon recalling the conversation of Ballytully, there were several of his expressions which at the time had only moved her indignation, as gross and impudent falsehoods, but which, when more calmly considered, appeared puzzling and even alarming in the extreme. He had adverted to the *length* of his attachment; he had pleaded *encouragement* received. He had even asserted the existence of an understanding—an engagement, between her father and his uncle, having their union for its object. Would Ballytully, rude and insolent though he was, have dared to hazard assertions so broad, without some foundation, when the means of confutation were so ready? Yet the fact appeared impossible: her father, her worthy, kind, indulgent father! to plot against the freedom and happiness of his child! could this be so? For a moment the brain of Isabelle reeled, and a pang like the freezing chill of death shot through her heart. It was but momentary: “O no, it *is* impossible! My dear, kind father, could never dream of so foully betraying his child!” she mentally exclaimed; “it is I, that have been unjust, in for an instant suspecting his affection or his honour!” Yet Isabelle, notwithstanding this specious reasoning, was not altogether tranquil. In spite of the

love, and almost devotion, she entertained for her father, she could not be altogether blind to his weaknesses; and although, like the virtuous children of Noah, she would have thrown a mantle over his infirmities, it was impossible that she should have lived with him so long in ignorance of that vacillating irresolution of mind, which was his chief defect and bane. It was the consciousness of this mental failing that staggered the judgment of Isabelle, abating the full effect of that confidence which she otherwise would have felt in her father's parental affection, and checking the full flow of that reaction which would otherwise have quite restored her equanimity. "At all events," she continued in her mental debate, "let me hear the truth from himself—it is due to him in justice as well as in duty; and let it be art or deception, or what it may, in that odious Ballytully, I shall at least know the worst."

Having thus resolved, she rose to give orders that when her father should arrive, he might be informed of her wish to see him; but a new train of ideas occurring at that moment to her mind, arrested her steps. The possible consequences of such a communication as she must make, and of such questions as she must put to her father, arose before her, in somewhat formidable array—misunderstandings, quarrels, breach of old friendships—all to be risked, and for what? The insolent pro-

posals of Ballytully had met with a decided and conclusive repulse—was it probable that he would renew them? Was it not rather likely that he would withdraw from Airdruthmore, which, after what had occurred, could scarcely be an agreeable residence to him? and in this case, she would no longer be exposed to his presence or his persecutions, and matters might arrange themselves happily without any officious or hasty interference on her part. These considerations still occupied her mind while her father arrived; and Isabelle, when she inquired for him, learned to her no small surprise, that he was engaged in a private conference with Ballytully. “Is it possible!” thought she; “then the matter is at once decided. If *he* seeks no concealment, surely I have no cause to do so; nor ought I to suffer my conduct to remain for a moment at his mercy—my father must at least hear both sides of the story,”—and she forthwith gave the order which brought her father to her apartment.

“My dear Isabelle! my dear child! what is the matter?” said the good laird, as on entering the room he observed the pale face of his daughter, in whose eyes the tears she had shed still left their traces. “You have been vexed—hurt, I fear—surely nothing that foolish fellow, Ballytully, has been saying, can have distressed you so?”

“ You have seen Ballytully, sir, I hear? Has he not told you the nature of his communication to me?”

“ He has been making a long harangue, of which I understood but little more than that he complains sorely of your having treated him with disdain—but what was it all?—how did it come about?—what did he mean?”

“ Nay, sir, it is from you and from him that I have to learn his meaning, for his words and expressions were to me nearly inexplicable—but does he accuse me of disdain? Did he tell you what had called it forth?”

“ Why in truth, my child, he did, in so far; I gathered from what he said, that he had been making a proposal of himself to you, and that you did little less than abuse him for it. Now, my dear girl, though you may not like the man, there was surely no cause for taking his offer as an affront. He is not a very polished person, Ballytully; but he is an honest man, I hope, and well to do in the world; and may surely even himself to the daughter of most Highland lairds. But there’s no force in the matter—if you can’t fancy him, there’s an end of it. I’m sure, unless it were that he’s a neighbour, and that it would be less of a separation, which, in truth, I could ill bear, my dear,” and a tear twinkled in the old gentleman’s eye, “ it would never be me that would press the matter.”

“ My dear father ! I was sure you would say so ! I knew the foolish man spoke falsely !—but did he say nothing more ? ”

“ He said a great deal more, my child, but very little to the purpose ; but in truth, all I cared about was to remove the silly impression of vexation he had taken at your reception of his addresses—and I left him where he was, to come to you.”

“ Why, what a strange person he must be, then, my father ? Honest he may seem, but honest I am very sure he is not. What will you say, when I tell you that to me he prated of long courtship—nay, of long *engagement*—of an engagement existing between you and his uncle Thomas, for years back, to form a union between himself and me !—of a conspiracy, in short, between that worthy person his uncle, and my own father, to dispose of his daughter without her own consent or knowledge ! He even talked of having received *encouragement* in his suit, and insinuated some obscure *threat* in case of disappointment. Now, I declare that this is the very first occasion on which I have ever heard a syllable of his affected passion or pretended claims. Is it wonderful, then, that I should have repulsed both with some little haughtiness ? But what, sir, can he mean by advancing such absurd falsehoods ? ”

The perplexity and uneasiness which gradually clouded the usually placid countenance of the

laird, during the progress of his daughter's discourse, afforded a true picture of his mind, while listening to her account of the conduct and language of her lover. And assuredly the pain which he suffered was but a just retribution for the culpable irresolution of his conduct, both towards the Macaskills and his daughter, in regard to the matter in question. He now perceived, feelingly, the pernicious effects of half-measures and indecision, and wished in vain that he had acted from the first hint of the elder Macaskill with that firmness which the nature of the subject demanded. But he was now fairly brought to bay. He had to decide between committing an outrage upon parental love and duty, or disappointing hopes, which however indirectly encouraged, he had never explicitly authorised. The effort was painful, but the decision was instant.

“My dear Isabelle,” he said, “I have been sadly wrong I find, although I know you will give me the credit I truly deserve for desiring to act right. There is, I must confess, a share of truth in what Ballytully has said, and which he cast up to me too, though I did not understand what you alluded to, when you asked me just now what had passed. The truth is, my dear child, that there has, as you know, been a long friendship between me and the uncle in Edinburgh, and it was far from unnatural, that Tom Macaskill, who felt perhaps that his brother might have

been a more creditable character, should wish to connect his nephew and heir, not only with an old and respectable family like ours, but one whom he has so long been on terms of friendship with. Now, sure enough, it is long since Tom made overtures to me on this subject—aye, when you, dear, were but a mere lassie. I laughed at him at first, but I saw no reason to check the idea on his part—for who was to tell but you might fancy the young man; he was a young fellow, though he has now got more advanced;—and I was not going to be in the way of a connexion that would have thrown part of the family property back into the hands of one of them. If it was lost to your brother William, poor fellow, there was no reason why it might not light back upon your lap. And truth to say, I did think very well of young Ballytully then, nor have I reason to do otherwise now, though he's no' just so polished, or so open in his ways—no' so fine a lad as young Tresham now—no' so much daylight in his face—and, surely, no' worthy of you, my dear Belle. But thus matters went on—there was no pressing—I aye said I would have nothing of the kind—just let matters take their own course. It's true I might have told Tom Macaskill all this more distinctly than I did: but I was loth to say any thing that might vex him; and whenever I showed any reluctance, it angered him so much that I just let things be. But never,

never, my dear bairn, did I think of forcing, or even urging you, to what ye didna wish—ye may believe that at least. But I see I have been very wrong—I should have been more open—more decided ;—I should have told *you* too, darling, and Tom often pressed me to do so ; and he might have thought I had done so—but I aye thought it would be like a sort of force or influence on my part, so I never hinted a word about what had passed to you. And truth to say, of late I have been less disposed to the thing. For when I saw how far behind you in all things this Ballytully was, and how many others there were that might deserve you better, I just could not bring my mind to it at all ; and, faith, there are some things about Ballytully I don't like so well of late—yet I can hardly say what they are. But you don't like him, my dear, and that puts an end to the matter any how—for never, never will I try to force you from your own inclinations, my dear child !”

“That is like yourself, my dear, dear father,” said Isabelle, throwing herself into the old man's arms. “ And now, if we have been wrong, let us do what justice we can. I was severe on Ballytully, when I thought him presumptuous and uncandid, but now that I see he had some foundation for his assertions, I owe him an apology, and he shall have one. Love him I cannot—I will not promise to respect him—but courtesy and civility is due to

every one, and he shall find, if he continues to visit here, that I can cheerfully perform my duty."

"You're a dear good child, my own Belle," said the old man, kissing her cheek, "and I wish I had half as much steadiness and judgment as you. It's no wonder Ballytully is vexed at the loss of such a prize: but he must e'en try to bear it. I don't think I could give you to him now, even if ye were to wish it; but, O, it's poor Tom that will be sore upon it, and it's his disappointment that I heed and dread. There's no saying what consequences it may have. But I hope he'll be reasonable. I should be sorry on many accounts to break with such an old friend."

"Why, my dear sir, if Mr. Macaskill is the sensible, warm-hearted, friendly man you take him for, there's surely little fear of a rupture between you. He must surely see that you could do no more than you have done—place the matter in my option, and let me decide: he never could expect you to use force!"

"I don't know—I don't know—these writer bodies often look more at the profit than the liking, in such cases. Tom knows very well that you have ten thousand pounds—a good *tocher* for a Highland laird's bride. He had set his heart on extending the Ballytully estate by some purchases of his own—and, indeed, some of the pendicles of this very estate, long since alienated. Then perhaps he

thinks—but no, hang it, Tom's not mercenary. It's true, I must owe him a good lump of coin; and many a job has gone through his hands that it might vex me sore to have brought up against me; but surely that never could have influenced him in this affair?" Yet the uncomfortable suspicion which every now and then crossed the laird's mind regarding the important matters of business which were at the mercy and in the absolute power of Thomas Macaskill, Esq. W. S., checked the tide of confidence with a painful twinge.

Before he could resume the discourse, which had thus been disagreeably broken, he was more effectually interrupted by a servant, who, after knocking at the door, exclaimed, in a hurried voice, "Sir! the laird o' Ballytully's off!—he wouldna wait dennar!"

"Ballytully gone!" re-echoed the laird, opening the door; "why, when? how? I left him not five minutes ago in the parlour."

"Aye, sir! but he's gone; there was a man cam' cross the burn in all haste, they say, wi' a letter; an' when the laird got it he flung out like mad, an' off to the stables. His servant had his horse ready, an' his things strappet on, an' he mounted, an' off at the gallop. The housekeeper seed him as he went out o' the door—'Ye're no' going withoot ye're dennar, Ballytully?' says she. 'D—n the dennar, ye auld ——' (wi' yere leave, sir,) was all his answer. A lad at the square

asked him where he was for at that time o' nicht. 'What the de'il's that to you?' says he, an' off he set. I'm thinking there's something no' right wi' him, sir."

"No' right!—I believe he's mad!" said the laird, as they all went down stairs to inquire into this singular affair. "He's mad—mad as a march hare, I think; first he flies at my daughter, like a wild hectoring bully—then he attacks me in my own house, like a prophet in drink—and to crown all, off he puffs like a fire flaught, at the fore-end o' a cauld winter's night, when sober fouk are thinking of their dinners and their beds—the Lord defend me from such a randy of a son-in-law!"

The fact proved to be just as the servant had stated it. Ballytully had disappeared, taking with him every thing he had in the house; nor could any cause be assigned for his departure, unless it was the result of his interviews with the laird and his daughter, or the tidings brought by the second messenger who had arrived with dispatches that day. It had only been further remarked, that instead of taking the ordinary road down the glen, he had turned at the wooden bridge, crossed the Ruth, and taken the road which led up Strath Einort.

"A pretty business this, truly," said the laird to his daughter, as they returned to the drawing-room; "who could have imagined such mad conduct in Ballytully? I'm sadly afraid, as that

fellow said, that all is not right. But I own it does look a little like throwing down the gauntlet. His threats too;—faith if uncle Tom were to take a copy from the nephew, he might make himself heard, I'm thinking, to some purpose." And the anxious expression of the old gentleman's countenance affected his daughter more even than his words.

"What is it you mean, my dear sir? What can Mr. Macaskill do, if he were to do his worst, more than be angry?—Surely you have no cause to fear his unreasonable displeasure?"

"I don't know that," said the laird, musing. "He may do more than would be safe for me. And yet Tom would surely never dream of ruining his old friend for such a cause."

"Ruining you, my dear father!—for God's sake what can you mean? Surely, surely, we are in nowise in his power?"

"More, I'm afraid, than we ought to be, Belle, dear. But to tell you the truth, I don't rightly know how we stand. He has advanced me great sums of money lately. That same flood has been heavy upon me—and rents have been backward—and wood and wool have not sold well the year;—I'm pretty deep in Tom's books, I know—but I hope there's no fear."

"No fear, my dear father! but there is fear, if you are in any degree in the power of any man whatever! No fear! when you don't know how you stand with one with whom your transactions

are so large ! O, for Heaven's sake do not lose a day in making yourself acquainted with this. O, I knew not this !—never suspected it ! I might have been far more cautious—I might have denied myself many indulgences ! But now, my dear father, let us look the matter in the face. Let us learn our real situation, and let us stand in no man's reverence—especially in that of one who may be offended with us, however unreasonably. And whatever the uncle may be, the conduct of the nephew, at least, is liable to great suspicion.”

She stood with hands clasped and eyes again overflowing—the image of earnest entreaty and persuasion ; and such was her intense absorption in the subject of their discourse, that not until it had approached the door, was she roused by the sound of a well-known voice, and the tread of a well-known foot. It was Tresham, who had that moment arrived, and who, sensible of some disturbance in the house, yet finding no one in the way to give information, had made his way to the family apartment in order to announce himself. The start of Miss Stewart was almost simultaneous with the opening of the door ; and Tresham, as he entered, saw her standing in an attitude of mingled surprise and distress, yet with eyes which even at that trying moment beamed on him with delight at his approach—at the assurance of his safety.

“ Miss Stewart !—Airdruthmore !—but how ?—

in tears—in distress! Good heavens! what can be the matter?” exclaimed he, confounded at what he saw. “What has happened?”

“Nothing—nothing of consequence, my young friend,” said the laird, advancing with open hand; “nothing of any consequence. I’m very glad to see ye; ye’ll fill that strange chap Ballytully’s place, and a better bargain we’ll have of ye, I think.”

“Ballytully!—why, that’s true—what has come over the laird? I met him as I was coming here spurring like fury up the glen. I’m sure it was him; I knew his horse and the plaid he wears; but he seemed strangely agitated. I called to him, but he seemed rather disposed to ride over me, than to return me my ‘good even;’ so I e’en let him pass. But you seem all in confusion here: can I be of service?”

“It is nothing of much consequence, Mr. Tresham, as my father says,” observed Miss Stewart, who had now recovered a little from her confusion. “A little surprise only. Ballytully has left this on his own affairs, we believe, but we are unacquainted with his proceedings. As for yourself, you may be assured my father and I both rejoice at your return; but I must go and see where Maria is—what can be keeping her? We shall see you shortly in the dining-room, I hope.” And with these words, Miss Stewart glided from the room.

For some seconds after her departure, Tresham and the laird stood silently following her with their

eyes, then slowly turned to gaze upon each other. "Don't think me impertinent or intrusive, my dear sir," said the former; "but I fear something painful has happened, in spite of what you say.—Do pray make me useful, if you can. I hope no bad news?"

"N-o, not exactly; no—not bad news—only—in short, my dear Tresham, my daughter has been discomposed a little, as you saw, and I have been vexed. But it's all over now, and we'll see and make matters whole again:—a good dinner, and a glass of toddy, won't be bad things in this cold night; and you've come far it seems, eh?"

"O, but pardon me, sir," said Tresham, whose mind, recurring to the object of his journey, after recovering from the surprise he had encountered on his first arrival, connected the appearance of Ballytully with some event sinister to his hopes. "I entreat you—for God's sake, tell me? Has Miss Stewart's distress any thing to do with Ballytully or his departure? I have a powerful reason for the question?"

"Why, dear boy, you take us all a little by surprise, and out of sorts; but to a good friend like yourself, I hate to make mysteries. That foolish Ballytully has been vexing Belle; he's an old admirer of her's, you must know, and he thought fit just now to make his proposals a little abruptly. Belle gave him rather a short answer; so he took huff, and went off in a passion: but he'll come to,

he'll come to. But don't take any notice of this to Belle—she's flurried and vexed, poor thing; and it would distress her still more to have the matter talked of."

It required no small effort of self-control in Tresham to keep his agitation within bounds as the laird uttered these few explanatory words. But we have before observed, that the old gentleman was no very acute observer, and the constraint to which he subjected himself was successful. "Don't fear me, sir," said he, "I will be discreet; but, pray, was this repulse the sole reason of Ballytully's precipitate retreat at this late hour?—no unpleasant collision, I hope? The fellow was not impertinent?"

"O no, nothing of the sort; but they say, messengers came with letters to him twice to-day. Whether that were a pretence or no, I don't know; but he may have received some news that hurried him off."

"Aye, that he has, I dare say," replied Tresham, with a grim smile; "I dare say pressing business; but I believe, sir, I also should make myself decent before dinner. You are late, are you not? But it is all for my advantage, so I will retire, if you please, to adorn."

We shall not attempt to describe the whirl of thoughts which passed through Tresham's mind in the short space that elapsed before his appearance in the dining-room. The singular coincidence of

the event which had just taken place, with the warning discourse he had held only the preceding night at Breulach with Glenvallich, did not fail to occur to him with remarkable force. "My fate draws on, it would seem," said he; "my sole and unworthy rival is dismissed—were I to believe in special providences—just to make room for me; and here I arrive in the very nick of time to witness his defeat. And surely, unless I deceive myself, the smile with which Isabelle received me, although it did shine through tears, had more than merely pleasure in it. But her harassed mind must have time to rest a while: we must have patience, we must watch the propitious moment."

In the drawing-room Tresham found the family assembled, just as he left them a week before. The first glance around, however, betrayed to him that unlooked for as his arrival might be, the cause of his absence, and the events in which he had been engaged, were no longer secrets to the inhabitants of Airdruthmore. Miss Stewart was grave, and her calm and beautiful countenance no longer bore any trace of either pleasure or agitation. He even thought that her eye, when turned upon him, wore an expression of coldness, if not of reproach, which he was at a loss how to interpret. The laird had recovered his usual cheer, and came forward again to welcome his guest: but it was Miss Tresham who first opened the attack, and assailed her brother in her usual tone of lively raillery. "So,

Master Hal—*Vous voilà revenu!*—a pretty truant knight you have been, to desert your charge on false pretences, and run, Quixote-like, adventure hunting over the country, while bright eyes have grown dim with anxiety for your safety !”

“ Those bright eyes have done me too much honour, Maria ; but I question much if any other or brighter eyes than your own have thus suffered. Fraternal affection would render such uneasiness imperative on them.”

“ Well, well, we won’t dispute about eyes, since you have returned with your head unbroken. But come—in pity to our curiosity, tell us the news—see, we are all impatience.”

“ What news, what news from Ancrum fight?

“ What news from the bold Buccleugh !”

Glenvallich, I should rather say, for *he* is the chief who conducted this pretty escapade ?”

“ Why, I may reply to you, Maria, *not* just in the words of the same poet :

Glen Shlichard muir is *free* from gore,
For scarce one smuggler fell ;
And Glenvallich has told us evermore
To watch our *tenants* well.

But I pray you, good people, what strange Mercury has anticipated my news? for I own I rather did expect to be the first bearer of it hither. It is scarcely twenty-four hours since the business

took place, and little better than ten since I left the scene of action ; and the grass did not grow under my feet, I promise you, for it's full thirty miles, good Highland miles too, between this and the place where I slept last night."

"O, when important affairs are in course of occurrence, how can secrecy be looked for—a bird of the air will carry the matter. But to remove your astonishment in this particular instance, without the intervention of a miracle, you forget that you were attended from this same field of glory by two followers, neither of whom had lost the use of their tongues : so the kitchen is of course all in a stir already, and the drawing-room pants to be as well informed—so come, your adventures."

"Aye, boy, we are all gaping for them : who would have thought that yon demure Glenvallich, and your sly self, were quietly plotting such treason in the corner this time last week ? and never to let a word out to the old man about it, neither. But, faith, you were right there, for he could not have helped, and might have bothered you with his doubts and his difficulties."

"I dare say, sir, he might have helped us with his counsel ; but it would have scarcely been fair to involve him in what might have proved a troublesome failure after all. As it is, I hope we've 'done the state some service,' for we have assuredly dealt the rogues an ugly blow, and beat up their quarters to some purpose."

“Aye; but see, lad, that when ye harried the hives, ye took away the stings; for they’re wasps that are apt enough to use them when they lose their stolen honey.—But stay, there’s the dinner—better late than never. We have no time to lose, though; we shall keep your adventures for a desert.”

We shall not fatigue our readers by fighting our battles over again, or detailing the progress of Henry Tresham, as, assailed by question after question, he waded through a narrative of the events which had occurred since he had last left Airdruthmore. Nor need we describe the successive emotions which were depicted on the countenances of the company, as they listened to the various adventures of the tenkill, the pursuit, and the skirmish.

The laird, readily pleased by whatever tended to exalt his favourite, and excited by the vivid description of a stirring scene, was delighted with the whole procedure. Maria, wild with animation, almost wished she could have made one at the chase, both of the deer and of the smugglers; and even the gravity of Miss Stewart’s countenance relaxed into a smile of triumph, as Henry described in glowing terms, the spirited attack of Glenvallich and the forester, upon the principal band of the Glen Shlichard-men. But the smile soon vanished and the sadness returned, and when Tresham endeavoured occasionally to fix her attention by

some more pointed appeal, her averted eye and slightly-contracted brow denoted a mind pre-occupied and ill at ease.

The disquietude of his mistress was by no means unnoticed by Tresham. He watched her countenance furtively—for the delicacy of genuine affection taught him to refrain from adding, even by a look, to the obvious uneasiness of her mind; and he speculated with busy anxiety, as lovers will do, on every change of expression which he saw there. But it was in vain that he sought to read the secrets of the prison-house:—female pride and reserve were on their guard, so that not an incautious glance nor tell-tale blush was suffered to escape to betray the state of the maiden garrison within. In utter perplexity as to the real sentiments of Isabelle, Tresham retired for the night to seek a repose which even fatigue failed to render sound. Irresolute as to the course he ought to pursue, he could only determine on bending his whole mind to ascertain the true dispositions of his mistress: and by availing himself of the earliest opportunity that should occur of declaring his sentiments, to put an end to a state of doubt and anxiety which was every moment becoming more intolerable.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBTS—DESPONDENCY—ASSURANCE.

O my soul's joy! if after every tempest come such calms!

AN anxious heart makes a sleepless pillow. A feverish irritation of mind and body rendered Tresham's couch both wakeful and uneasy; nor was it until the grey dawn of morning began to glimmer through his chamber window that he dropped into a heavy and unrefreshing slumber. When he awoke, the general movement in the house convinced him that the morning was already far advanced, and in fact, when he entered the breakfast-room, he found the family already assembled at their meal.

The light of a bright frosty morning has at all times an exhilarating effect; and Tresham's spirits, as he proceeded down stairs to join the party, did not fail to acknowledge its enlivening influence.

“I am a fool,” said he mentally, as he left his room; “I have been alarming and distressing myself about shadows—I have imagined a coldness, a displeasure, which Isabelle does not, which she can have no cause to feel towards me.” But the first glance at Isabelle, as he entered the breakfast-room, destroyed his hopes and recalled his apprehensions. Airdruthmore was kind and frank; Maria lively and playful as ever; but on the brow of Isabelle there hung a cloud, so chill, so dark, as to strike him with dismay. The words of greeting were the same as usual, kind, courteous, even cheerful; but the look, the tone in which they were uttered, slight, almost imperceptible as it was, uttered volumes to a lover’s ear, of coldness.

So painful was the feeling occasioned by this unexpected check to his reviving hopes, that for a while he sat silent and gloomy, absorbed in his unpleasant reflections, until recalled by the raillery of his sister to a sense of his uncourteous behaviour. But the gravity of the lovers threw a damp over the spirits of the party, and it was a relief to all when the meal was at an end.

Well pleased, doubtless, to escape from so unpleasant and unusual a species of restraint, Airdruthmore had quitted the room, while Miss Tresham, occupied with a letter, took possession of an arm-chair close to the fire. Tresham and Isabelle remained seated at the breakfast-table, both silent, and, as it seemed, both occupied with their own

busy thoughts. Those of Miss Stewart, if appearances might be trusted, were not of the most pleasing nature, for more than once did she pass her hand unconsciously across her brow, as if to brush away the weight which hung there; and, at length, rising from her seat, she went and fixed an unconscious gaze upon the clear frosty landscape without.

Whatever were Tresham's cogitations, we must suppose them to have had at least some reference to his fair companion in abstraction, for many a furtive glance still wandered over her person, even when the downcast lids concealed the direction of his eyes. A flush of keen agitation passed over his countenance as he followed her with his look to the window, and a calm observer might have detected the fierce though momentary struggle in his bosom as he rose and approached the spot where she stood. "What a beautiful day," said he, after a pause of some moments, during which he remained silently considering her countenance; "what a lovely sky! not a cloud

To speck the azure face of Heaven!

Will Miss Stewart pardon me if I venture to express my regret that all does not seem so cloudless within?"

A flush of painful confusion dispelled the moody air which occupied the countenance of Isabelle, as she listened to this address, but she

answered not. "I entreat you to forgive me, Miss Stewart, if I distress you; I would not, for the world, give you a moment's pain, but I have suffered more than I can tell you, from the thought, the dread, that I have in some way offended you; tell me, I entreat you, what have I done? what is the cause of that coldness, that reserve?" A deep and painful blush overspread the cheeks of Isabelle as she eagerly interrupted him,—

"O no, no," said she, "no coldness, no reserve; you mistake, be assured, Mr. Tresham, you mistake; you have not offended, how could you think so? It is nothing of that sort. There are circumstances indeed—but they have no relation, no concern with you."

"I thank you, I bless you for the word, my dear Miss Stewart; you know not how you have relieved me. Ah! could you deem me worthy, could I be of the slightest service, how gladly—"

"It is impossible Mr. Tresham," said Isabelle, again interrupting him. "I do not doubt your friendship, but here it can do nothing; indeed I should not—I cannot explain; but the circumstances which have discomposed me are not of a nature to admit of your friendly aid."

"I grieve to hear it—I deeply regret it, Miss Stewart. If I could but be useful, if I could but show my zeal—my devotion—" The animation of Tresham had rapidly increased, his heart was on his lips, and there is little doubt he would at this

moment have poured out his whole soul at the feet of his mistress had time and opportunity served, but just at this critical juncture they were joined by Miss Tresham, whose presence put an end to the conversation.

“Well, good folks, what are you plotting there ; nothing against me I hope ?” said she.

“No, nothing, my dear, against you—nothing, at least, worse than rousing you from that fireside, to take a brisk walk in this keen bracing day ; it will do you a great deal of good.”

“Thank you for your prescription, my dear ; but I have no great taste for your sharp bracing air. I am content with the genial atmosphere of the fire-side, where I shall stay and finish my drawing ; but you, my dear, had better go—that pale cheek requires it, I’m sure—and here’s Harry will play beau on the occasion.” But the cheek of Isabelle was no longer pale when she heard the half-arch, half well-meant proposal of her lively friend, who doubtless was not altogether blind to the situation of the parties—and saw the look of entreaty which Tresham turned upon her.

“No,—no,” she hastily replied ; “I think you are very wise, Maria !—I too must be busy in my own room. Mr. Tresham will be better uncumbered.”

There was a rapidity of utterance, almost amounting to harshness, in the tone and manner of Isabelle as she said this, that quite confounded

Tresham. Heart-struck and disappointed, he turned at once from the window, and without another word, took up a book and quitted the room.

In the solitude of his own chamber, Tresham sought to collect his thoughts, and arouse himself from the stunning shock with which the strange and unexpected conduct of Isabelle—a conduct so opposite, as he conceived, to the courteous gentleness of her disposition, had affected his whole mind. “Such then is the end of all my hopes;—the termination of all my brilliant dreams of happiness!—Vain, sanguine fool that I am, how have I deceived myself!—how have I miscalculated and misconstrued the interest which I flattered myself to have secured in the heart of Isabelle; and yet can I have been altogether, and so utterly mistaken? assuredly the tokens of regard I have received from her have neither been few nor trivial. Who is there that is favoured by such marks of her confidence as myself—a confidence never lightly bestowed, and indicating so perfect a sympathy of tastes and dispositions?—Nay, if the language of the eyes can be trusted, have not I seen those of Isabelle brighten with pleasure, when I have returned to this place, after even a few days’ absence?—yet, now when returned from an enterprize of some hazard, and entitled, so far, to hope for the reward of successful exertion, her looks have become cold, her manners constrained, and she

shuns even the possibility of being alone with me for a moment!—It must be so—either I have most grievously erred in reading her heart, or some unknown cause exists to forbid her yielding me encouragement; for if her dispositions towards me were in any degree favourable, surely this was the moment for permitting it to appear.”

Thus reasoned Tresham, if so calm and methodical a term can be fitly applied to the tumultuous succession of distressing thoughts which passed through his brain as he paced his chamber with unequal and hurried steps. Harassed by doubt, and oppressed by gloomy forebodings, he viewed both past and present through a distorted and desponding medium. How blind are mortals—how we grope our way, darkling, through a maze of incidents, often within reach of the object of our pursuit, but missing it by a hair's-breadth, when the slightest glimpse of light would enable us to grasp it!—Could Tresham but have known the simple truth, could he have but seen what was at that moment passing in the mind of Isabelle—had he known in its full extent the painful nature of the scenes she had so lately encountered—the disclosures she had heard, and the struggles, the efforts imposed upon her by the part which she felt called upon to act;—had he but dreamed, that to banish from her heart that image, which, in the dim perspective of the future, had, almost unconsciously become the cynosure

of peace and happiness to her soul, was, she felt, the bitterest, the most hopeless of all these efforts. Had Tresham known but the half of this, he would have hailed as a blessed omen, what he now deprecated as a signal of death to his hopes.

Vexed and harassed by such painful and gloomy cogitations, Tresham at length resolved to cool the fever of his mind, by a solitary walk in the open and bracing air. The brightness of the day invited him to prolong his ramble, and after making a round of the nearer woods, he found himself at length in that part of them through which ran the path to Elsie's cottage. The singular scenes which had occurred there, and their influence upon the subject which occupied his thoughts, were more strongly forced upon his recollection by surrounding objects. To a mind restless and unquiet, the slightest diversion is a relief, and Tresham almost mechanically turned his steps towards the cottage.

The old woman was not seen in her usual seat. The day was cold, the sun was dim, and a smoke from the chimney indicated that she was comforting herself in-doors, by the more kindly heat of a fire. Receiving the usual reply to his summons, Tresham entered, and found the aged sybil seated in her wooden arm-chair, before a blaze of sticks, which threw a red glare over her withered features.

“Ye're welcome, Mr. Tresham—thanks for

your kindness—doubly welcome are ye, that ye return in life and limb from yon wild glen, and yon wild ploy. An' are those that went wi' ye safe too? is the laird o' Glenvallich returned?"

"The laird of Glenvallich is safe, Elsie; and I thank you for him and for myself."

"And, O, hae ye come back wi' unbloody hands, young man? did ye mind in the strife, that the Lord loves the merciful?"

"I thank God, we did Elsie. I thank God there has been little harm done; and if blood has been spilt, it has not reached life, and was done in self-defence."

"The Lord be praised—the Lord be praised! but O, Mr. Tresham! saw ye *him*—him that I canna name?—Him o' whom ye spoke the last time ye was here; was na *he* there too?"

"He was there, Elsie."

"And did ye meet?"

"We did, and your fears were almost realized. I was in no small danger, and but for a providential intervention, would probably have lost my life."

"An' didna I say it---didna I say it? But what cam' o' *him*?—for I ken he didna fall—I ken that weel; he's keepit for other work---evil work! his hour is na come yet awhile; there's muckle to do 'ore then. But what cam' o' him?"

"I cannot tell you, Elsie. He escaped;—escaped

after nearly killing Glenvallich's forester, poor fellow !”

“ Weel, weel, the Lord's will be done ! Ochone ! if it wud please Him to avert the ill that yon evil one will yet commit !”

“ What, Elsie, are you not done with it yet ? but cheer up, my good dame ; ill prophets are not always true ones, else I should scarce be here to-day. You know you have warned me more than once already.”

“ An' did my warning prove a false one then, young man ?” said the old woman, with a sharpness which evinced her jealousy of the reputation she possessed, however distressing might be the faculty on which it was founded ;---“ have ye forgotten yon wild *spate* ? an' if ye didna fall by the sword in Glen Shlichard, mind that though I warned you to take heed, I never minted at your doom. But ochone !” continued she with failing energy, and shuddering slightly as she spoke, “ would that the Lord wud mak' me a false prophet this blessed day---for then wud muckle o' dule an' sorrow be spared to them that best I love. O ! may he grant that this ould and useless body be could in the grave `ore then !---But let them that hae the power, bring the help in time, or they may rue it when they canna mend it.”

“ Explain yourself, Elsie ! what is it you are at now ? If you dread evil to those you love,

surely you can tell it plainly. I am sure those you have most cause to love, are those whom I love dearly too; and the will to aid them should not be wanting, if the power be in me:—but you must speak out, Elsie—remember I do not share in that faculty of yours, of foreseeing evil.”

“And thank the Almighty that it is so, young man! it saves you muckle woe, and muckle doubt—for a dreary and unsatisfying gift it is. But think ye that the black rock wunna hurt the boat because it’s hidden by the waters?—is the precipice less dangerous to the shepherd when the hill is covered wi’ mist?—can I say more than is shown to me? or am I to hold my tongue because I canna tell the hale tale? Young man, young man! if a’ did their pairt as this frail ould being is willing to do, who can tell but the evil might yet be prevented, an’ many a sorrowful day and sleepless night be spared us a’.”

“In the name of God, then, Elsie, do tell me what you mean! Is there any thing in my power? It seems as if you aimed at me, by these dark allusions; and yet I declare I am utterly at a loss to comprehend what you would have me to do!”

“Are ye so, truly, young man?—then ye’re no the lad I took ye for!—and yet that hand and that voice should belong to a leal heart. Hear to me, young man!—this many a day and many a week hae ye been eating o’ the bread and drinking o’ the cup o’ Airdruthmore: ye call him your

friend, and he takes you to be his. Now put your hand till your bried, an' tell me, this blessed meenat, what is it that has keepit a stranger like yoursel' so long in a far country, awa' from your own kin and your own business? In the name o' them from whose warm hearts ye have gotten the welcome o' a son or a brither, I bid you answer!"

The old woman suddenly rose from her chair, as she uttered these words:—with one withered arm she supported her emaciated body; whilst the other was stretched, with commanding gesture, towards Tresham, on whom her sightless eyeballs glared with as much earnestness, as if they could have read his heart.

Confounded by her energy, as much as by her unexpected appeal, the young man remained silent, at a loss how to reply. But Elsie did not give him long time to meditate; for after the pause of a few seconds, she followed up her first address with equal earnestness.

"Ye dinna speak! ye dinna answer!—weel then, I'll answer for ye. Ye love the daughter of Airdruthmore!—aye, it is so! an' weel I wot it's no a wunder that ye do so; for she's lovely, an' she's good, an' she's weel born—an' maybe ye think she's rich—but let that be. Weel may ye love her—for search the broad land o' Scotland—aye, and o' fair England to the boot—and who will ye meet so worthy o' your love? Ye hae walked wi' her, and talked wi' her, and courted

her, and won—aye, won her sweet and innocent heart. An' what for hae ye done so? Was it to stand glowring after her, as she goes about, like an angel, doing good to all around her, an' syne to leave her wi' a broken heart, to be the scorn o' others, an' a misery till hersel', while ye go an' seek another love in your own country?—may shame and sorrow fa' the wicked heart cud think the villany—but no, that canna be! there's a weird against that, an' it canna misgive!"—and exhausted by her extraordinary exertion, the old woman sunk back into her seat.

Tresham feared she had fainted, and hastened to aid her; but, waving her hand, she gently repulsed him:—"It's nothing!—it's nothing!—it's the flesh—the weak, sinfu' flesh!" said she; "but the spirit manna faint!—Hear what I say, young man! there's sorrow and misfortune hanging over the house o' Airdruthmore, an' it's now that their friends—if friends they have—should watch, and be ready in their help, for the time o' need is at hand. Ye should be a friend, Mr. Tresham—see that ye act a friend's part. It's no' by careering o'er the country, an' meddling wi' other folks' matters, that ye'll help those that afore long 'ill hae to trust to you for aid. Mak' a clean briest, if ye be a man, an' that afore ye're a day oulder: let them ye love ken what they hae to trust to; dinna let a kindly bosom hae a sore heart, when a word from you can mak' it a blythe one; an' din-

na slight the blessings o' the Almighty, when it's his will to make your duty and your happiness agree thegither."

The cheek of Tresham glowed, and his heart beat thick, as the old woman's meaning reached his apprehension, through the misty medium of her periphrastic language. "I believe I understand you now, Elsie," said he; "and could I be but sure you were right—could I but believe what you tell me,"—he hesitated, and stopped; for the old woman had suddenly assumed an attitude of intense attention.

"Certain!" repeated she, with more than usual rapidity of utterance; "and think ye that *I* am like to be deceived in such a matter?—that *I* wud speak on chance, where so precious a peace is at stake? He that never seeks can never find. There's but ae way o' kenning the truth, an' that 'ill be in your power, 'ere ye leave the bit ye're stanning in. Let what's passed in the last hour be atween me an' yoursel', for love has broken both faith an' duty this blessed day!" Her eyes were turned towards the door, as if to watch for an expected guest: those of Tresham instinctively followed their direction—a pause ensued—a light footstep was heard—the entrance was darkened by a female figure—it was that of Isabelle Stewart!

"Elsie! my dear moome!" began the young lady, as the figure of the old woman, illuminated by the glowing embers, at first met her glance;

but ere she could finish the sentence, she stopped short, started, and gazed with a look of alarm, for her eye lighted upon the figure of Tresham. It was some instants ere the comparative darkness enabled her to recognize him ; and then the apprehension which was rising in her bosom, gave way to confusion——“ Mr. Tresham !—I did not know—I did not think !”—She stopped, and trembled violently.

Tresham caught up the only other chair within reach, and offering it, said——“ I intreat your pardon, Miss Stewart : I had no thoughts of intruding on you here : I only stumbled upon our good old friend’s dwelling, by chance, in my ramble. Indeed I believed I should have woods and glens and all to myself this day, for I thought you had resolved against going out.”

“ It is true, I did so,” said Isabelle, with increasing confusion ; “ but a violent headache induced me to change my mind, by rendering me unfit for work ; so I was glad at last to try the open air—but ladies are privileged to be capricious, you know,” continued she, with a faint smile, “ so why should I trouble you with apologies for change of purpose ?”

“ Yes, I have heard it said so,” replied Tresham, with some bitterness of expression ; “ and it is too valuable a privilege, doubtless, to be lost for want of use :”—but scarcely had he uttered the words, when his heart smote him, especially as,

even by the imperfect light of the cottage, he thought he could observe that the eyes of Isabelle stood brimful of tears. The words of Elsie came to his recollection ; and he could have cursed his own impetuous folly, that could so thoughtlessly and cruelly distress the gentle being whom, in his heart, he would have cherished and protected from all harm.

For a moment Isabelle appeared unable to speak, but quickly recovering, she turned to her old nurse, inquiring with her usual interest after her welfare and comfort. “ It’s weel wi’ me, darling, when I see you weel—as weel as I can ever hope to be or wish to be: the sapless tree decays fast, and that’s the way it shud be; but young blossoms shudna hang their heads for every rough wun that blows ow’r them, for the sun will shine out when the cloud goes by, an’ then comes the lown sweet hour o’ happiness. But there’s ae word I hae to tell you, maithal—and this is it—it’s a bonnie bit this, an’ a sweet, but it’s lone an’ far off, just fitted for an ould thrawarl carline like mysel’; but dinna ye be traveling the way an’ late, as ye do whiles—it’s no just cannie.”

“ Why, my dear moome, what is there to fear? for years past I have been constantly coming to see you here, and what should hinder me now? what new fancy is this?”

“ Weel, darling, that’s true, but mind ye my words, for a’ that: dark glens and late hours

are no' cannie for young maidens ; there's one at your side will be blythe to protect you, and be your guardian whenever ye come ; and now it's wearing late, an' the dew will be falling, so dinna ye be staying, dear—an' I'll awa' to my bed, for the could's ow'r muckle for my poor ould bones."

"Your nurse is right, Miss Stewart, it is getting late. You admit that you are not quite well, surely it is not wise to remain here till the afternoon becomes more chill. If I might venture to offer my services? Nay," continued he with a smile, observing her still to hesitate, "I shall think you have quarrelled with me downrightly, if you decline every offer of attendance I make to-day."

Isabelle coloured deeply but hesitated no longer. "You shall not have that to say nor to think, Mr. Tresham," said she ; "I meant to have sat a little while with my nurse this day, but as I have already incurred the imputation of caprice and inconsistency, I must try to avoid that of obstinacy or ingratitude."

"And little can they ken o' you, darling, that wud lay the one or the other till your charge ; but dinna waste precious time—trust to a leal heart and a stout arm : for the time may come when both will be sore needed !"

"Nay, do not refuse it," said Tresham, gently drawing the arm of Isabelle within his own as they left the cottage. "I do not know what new

calamity your old nurse may foresee, but Miss Stewart and her friends may depend on one heart and arm at least for their service, in case of need?"

"And happen what may, Mr. Tresham, we are grateful for the offer, although I trust we may not have to tax your friendship very heavily. But my poor old nurse is failing fast; her mind often wanders sadly, and a disposition to gloomy forebodings is the natural effect of her increasing intellectual weakness."

"I do not know; weak and infirm as Elsie may sometimes appear to be, I should scarce venture to assert that the failure of her corporeal powers has affected those of her mind in equal proportion: at times her energy at least, is great, and her language though obscure and periphrastic as usual, seems to convey a meaning which, to herself at least, is pregnant with emphasis and intelligence; and strange as it perhaps may seem, although I am not quite up to the interpretation of it, there is a force and semblance of genuine truth and honesty in all she says, that has obtained a strong influence over my own mind."

"Ah! so you are a convert at last," said Isabelle with a faint smile. "But what had my old moome been saying to-day, that has left so strong an impression?"

"Much, Miss Stewart—much of a nature calculated both to interest and impress me deeply—for

what is there that relates to you or to your family which can fail of interesting me?"

"Of me and my family!" repeated Miss Stewart hurriedly and turning pale, "and what can she have been saying of us to excite so much interest at present?" The tone and anxiety in which Isabelle uttered this question, belied the faint smile which accompanied it, and she listened with impatience for her companion's reply.

"She spoke," said Tresham, "of evil as overhanging the house of Airdruthmore, and called upon all true friends of the family to be ready with their aid; for that the hour of trial was at hand—and in truth, Miss Stewart, when I call to mind your own expressions, and what I myself have seen within the last few hours; when I couple the solemn and singular premonitions of this extraordinary old creature, with the uneasiness which you yourself have not been able to conceal, can you wonder that I also should be uneasy, and anxious, most anxious, to learn what this threatened evil may be, and to discover whether my assistance, feeble as it is, may not be of use in the hour of need. But, pardon me, I distress you—forgive me, I entreat you—I fear I have been presuming—indiscreet—" for Tresham, stealing a look at his fair companion, perceived to his surprise, that tears were trickling down her cheek.

"O no," replied she faintly, "but I am very

foolish—very weak ; but when the nerves are shaken, trifles will agitate one.”

“ Good heavens ! Miss Stewart ; what have I done—what is the cause of this agitation ?—you are faint—do pray lean upon me,” and Isabelle, who trembled exceedingly, was fain to avail herself of the proffered aid, without which she felt that she should have sunk to the ground.

“ I am ashamed of myself,” said she, “ I am ashamed of causing you so much needless uneasiness—I cannot tell what weakness has overcome me, but the truth is, I have not been well, not for some days—I thought the air would do me good, but it has been a little too much for me.”

“ Nay, Miss Stewart,” said Tresham earnestly, “ there is something more in this disorder. Pardon me if I take too great a freedom—but I feel assured that something very painful has occurred. I would not for the world offend you ; but I have been too long an inmate of this family, to view with indifference any evil that can affect its inmates, however remotely—if you could know what happiness it would give me to be of the slightest service—tell me, only tell me, how I may be useful !”

“ Ah ! you are very good,” replied Isabelle trembling still more, while the tears dropt faster from her eyes, “ believe me, I feel your kindness—but—I am very foolish.—O, I should not have exposed myself to this !”- she stopped, unable to proceed.

“ Dear Miss Stewart ! Dearest Isabelle,” exclaimed Tresham, supporting her with one arm, while her sobs became now irrepressible, “ would to heaven I had the power, the blessed privilege of drying these tears—would to heaven you would grant me the right of assisting you—you know—you cannot but feel, dearest Isabelle, that I would lay down my life to serve you !” Utterly unable to check the nervous burst of distress which overwhelmed her, and still more so to support herself, it was some moments before Isabelle could recover a portion of composure or strength to extricate herself from the sustaining arms of her companion.

“ O leave me ! Mr. Tresham,” she at length said, “ leave me, I entreat you—I am ashamed you should have witnessed this childishness !”

“ No, Isabelle, I cannot—I will not leave you now—I cannot any longer endure what I have suffered for these few past hours—the moment I have longed for, yet dreaded, has come. I know what I risk, but I must run the hazard, and you must hear me to an end; and if you bid me leave you then, it must be for ever !” Again were the pale features of Isabelle crimsoned with a rich but momentary blush, and one speaking glance was turned towards the speaker’s person. It was but a momentary weakness.

“ Stop, Mr. Tresham !” said she, “ I must not suffer this—you know not what you say ! I entreat you to leave me !”

“ I cannot, Isabelle—the die is cast, and I must know my fate. Isabelle, dearest Isabelle, I love you deeply, devotedly ; long, long have I done so, and you have known me long, Isabelle—we are surely no strangers to each other ; then such as I am, say may I hope to win your affection ?—Such as I am, can you look upon me as your friend, your lover, as your future husband !” He turned and looked upon her face, it was deadly pale ; the momentary strength which she had struggled to maintain, failed under the powerful revulsion of her feelings.

“ O this is cruel, Mr. Tresham,” she faintly articulated ; and had he not promptly sprung forward to support her, she would have sunk to the ground. Even at that agitating moment he felt that this weakness was not unfavourable to his hopes, and a thrill of rapture shot through his soul, as for some happy moments he pressed the passive form of his lovely mistress to his bosom.

But bliss is ever fleeting. Isabelle recovered her presence of mind ; and though the blood, which had forsaken her cheek, rushed back in double tides over face, and neck, and bosom, and though her downcast eye was turned for a moment upon her lover, with that look which can never be mistaken,—she covered her face with her handkerchief, and said in a firmer tone—

“ Release me, I entreat you, Mr. Tresham, there must be no more of this. O, I take blame

to myself; but I was surprised—weakly surprised and overcome. We must separate—and— it must be said— for ever!”

“ Good heavens ! what mean you, Isabelle ? ” exclaimed Tresham, catching the half-articulated word ; for her voice had failed her as she uttered it. “ Can you thus sport with my feelings ? After what has this instant passed, can you thus wantonly crush my growing hope ?—it cannot be— your looks—your eyes declare it. Say—let me believe them.”

“ Ah, Mr. Tresham, our looks and our feelings too, are sometimes sadly rebellious. But let me not deceive you ; weak I may have been, disingenuous I will not be ; you have qualities and talents fitted to win the affections of a far more worthy object than me ; but—there are reasons—there are obstacles—insurmountable, I fear.”

“ Obstacles, Isabelle ! for heaven’s sake, what are they ? tell me, and they shall be removed—if in my power to do so ; torture me not with suspense, dearest Isabelle ! ”

“ O calm yourself, Mr. Tresham, I am unequal to this agitation. Alas ! it will do you no service, for the obstacles to which I allude are not in your power to remove.”

“ But name them, dear Isabelle ; name them : you know not what a zealous and willing heart can effect ; is it in me they exist ? I will be any thing you wish.”

“O not in you, Mr. Tresham, not in you; in gratitude, in candour, I owe it to your worth and to your affection. There are few who might not feel gratified by finding themselves the object of your love,” said Miss Stewart, in a tone of earnest feeling. “The fact is, it is with reluctance I come on a subject so painful; but in justice to you and to myself I must do so. The circumstances I alluded to, are entirely connected with my own family, and I know not myself their full extent. I fear my poor father has got into deep embarrassments. He has trusted too much to others, and neglected his own affairs; and has met the common fate of those who do so. I fear he is deeply involved with these Macaskills—and—and Ballytully is exasperated; he left the house last night in great wrath; and this may tell sorely against my father in the settlement which must take place. I only learned these things myself last night, and you will allow them to be sufficient cause for any disturbance you may have remarked in me. But after all, I talk in utter ignorance of the truth; it may be yet more dreadful than I anticipate.”

“Impossible, dearest Isabelle; believe me, your fears exaggerate the evil. I cannot imagine things to be in so bad a state as you dread. But supposing the worst to be true, surely your father is too just and liberal, too much interested in your happiness, not to rejoice at seeing a refuge prepared for you against the coming storm.”

“ Ah, Mr. Tresham, and could I at such a moment bring myself to leave him? could I even think of myself? I who am every thing now to him—when his son—his only son—my dear brother William, is kept at a distance by his hazardous profession. Could I leave my father, the kind and only parent, who has to me supplied the place of the mother whose care I never knew? I thank God, that should the worst befall us, it may still be in my power to shield him from utter poverty, without being a burthen on my poor brother, who must suffer so deep and unlooked-for a loss. I have promised to be candid, Mr. Tresham, and I will be so. The fortune of my mother, which was settled upon me, is at my own disposal, and never would I deprive myself of the power to devote that fortune and myself to the comfort and ease of my dear father.

“ And can you, dearest Isabelle, do me the injustice to suppose for a moment that I could wish it otherwise? Surely I need not tell you that it was Isabelle Stewart I loved, before I knew she had a shilling which she could call her own. So far should I be from desiring to deprive you of the power of assisting and comforting your father, that I only wish to aid you in the task. It is true I am not rich, Isabelle, but besides my own little fortune, I have my profession, and the prospect of rising in it. And you, dear Isabelle, you are too simple in your tastes to be ambitious of wealth

—too prudent to require riches; how happy should we be, with hearts devoted to each other!”

“Ah, Mr. Tresham, these are the flatteries of hope and a sanguine disposition. I dare not, and I should not listen to them. I cannot, as I told you, leave my father; and yet my duty would require that I should accompany my husband. No, no, let us not deceive ourselves; my duty is plain, and I must not permit myself to be seduced from pursuing its obvious dictates.”

“Do not drive me to despair, Isabelle,” said Tresham passionately; “believe me that the paths of duty and of happiness may be oftener brought to coincide than the world supposes. Let us view the bright side of the picture, dearest Isabelle. Believe me that our affairs will mend; your father’s embarrassments will diminish under the inspection of judicious and upright friends. I will myself speak to him on the subject, and learn the truth; as for these Macaskills, I think, so far as they are concerned, we have a hold over them that they little think of. I cannot explain it to you now, but trust me, dearest, that all will yet go well.”

“May God grant it!” said Isabelle, with a smile and a sigh, as they entered the house, and as Tresham fondly pressed the hand which leant upon his arm. “But, remember, I pledge myself to nothing; I must collect my thoughts and think on what has passed; for I have been sadly agi-

tated. To-morrow, I hope, we may see things more calmly, and talk more sensibly !”

Such was the sum of this interesting and agitating interview ; and Tresham, as he retired to compose himself in his chamber, could not help looking back with amazement at the sudden change which his feelings had undergone since he last crossed its threshold ; at the rapidity with which he had been hurried from uncertainty into terror and despondency, and from despair almost to the summit of happiness and exultation

CHAPTER VI.

A HIGHLAND CHRISTMAS.

“ Now all our neighbours’ chimnies smoke,
And Christmas blocks are burning,
Their ovens they with baked meats choke,
And all their spits are turning.

Without the door let sorrow lie,
And if for cold it hap to die,
We’ll bury’t in a Christmas pie,
And ever more be merry?”

“ AH ! master Harry,” said his sister, as Tresham entered the room to attend the ladies to the dining-room ; “ so you have returned safe and sound from your ramble ? I hope you have come back in better humour than you left us. Your face does seem a little sweeter ; I’m sure it would have soured all the milk in the dairy when you made your exit this morning. What had come over you, Harry ? was it because none of us fair dames

would attend your honour on its promenade this forenoon, or chose to risk catching cold in your service? Upon my word, you looked as savage as a baited bull, and flung out of the room quite in the Montoni style, I assure you. Isabelle there was quite terrified—and as pale—no, not as she is *now*, certainly, but pale enough she was at the time, I assure you; it was abominable in you to frighten her so.”

“Why can’t you let a gentleman have his humours, Maria, without insisting on his accounting for every one of them? you ladies claim more latitude in your caprices.”

“Aye, so we do, but then we keep them to ourselves; we don’t annoy others with them. I’m sure Isabelle, there, had some idea you were going to hang or drown yourself, you looked so much under the influence of the blue devils; where did you find him, Isabelle? did you cut him down from some willow? or fish him up from some of these linns or pools? he looks as if he had taken a lover’s leap this morning. Eh—Hal?”

“Poh, nonsense, Maria, how can you rattle on at such a rate? come, off with you to dinner; it will shut your mouth at least.”

“But not my eyes, brother Hal,

‘Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell!’

I suspect the devils that led you astray to-day were not altogether blue,” whispered she, with

tormenting perseverance as they entered the dining-room.

To endure attacks such as this, is a penance to which persons, in the situation of Isabelle Stewart and Henry Tresham, are always liable. It is a tax they pay for concealment of happiness; for the secret pleasure which is so delightful, and which one so reluctantly exchanges for the more pointed inuendoes and annoying congratulations, that too certainly assail declared lovers. Their's was a pleasure, not perhaps the less poignant that it was still chequered by some shade of doubt and anxiety; for such is human inconsistency, that present enjoyment is ever less prized than prospective and contingent bliss. To Isabelle it was a trying evening; for although the events of the day had removed from her heart a load of doubt, and anxiety, and self-reproach, which heavily oppressed it, still the *eclaircissement* had been so sudden, and the agitation so overpowering, that she longed for the hour when, in the silence of her own chamber, she could commune with her own breast, and feel the certainty of happiness; for spite of the dread which still hung over her, when she glanced at the possible ruin of her father's affairs, the assurance that her affection was fully and devotedly returned by him who had won her heart, was a deep and abiding source of joy.

Tresham, on the other hand, was no less en-

grossed by his own cogitations. In the generous scruples of Isabelle, he saw nothing discouraging; with the sanguine hope of a youthful and ardent mind, he contemplated only the favourable arrangement of Airdruthmore's difficulties, and the consequent early union of himself with the object of his affections. With his own future plans he did not for the present embarrass himself; but he saw the necessity of paying immediate attention to the affairs of the good old laird, who was obviously little qualified for assisting himself in his present dilemma. To this object, therefore, he resolved to direct his whole endeavours, and accordingly having obtained the consent of Isabelle to the measure, on the succeeding morning he requested an interview with his worthy host.

We shall not dilate upon the form in which Tresham opened his business, nor the joy of the good laird's heart at a discovery, which, honest man! he now made for the first time, that his frank-hearted young friend was the lover of his daughter. The kindness which Airdruthmore had once entertained for Ballytully had of late very much abated, and particularly since he had occasion to compare the manners of that doughty personage with the more elegant exterior and polished address of the young Englishman. Even his confidence in the rough honesty and innate worth, with which it was his fancy to invest the nephew of his old friend, seemed grievously sha-

ken; and, in spite of the uneasiness which he entertained at displeasing his friend, the W. S., he was greatly relieved by the event which had freed him from a secret and irksome thralldom. He could neither quite forgive nor forget the unmanly threats which Ballytully had thrown out on the preceding evening, nor was he insensible to the indelicacy of that person, in suggesting that his daughter might enter into the consideration to be given as the price of a favourable arrangement of his affairs; and his joy at finding himself freed from an embarrassing dilemma, was not greater than that which he experienced, on discovering that the rude and mercenary lover, who had taken so unceremonious a leave, was to be replaced by his elegant and generous favourite, Tresham.

“I don’t know when I’ve been so well pleased, my dear boy. ‘Odd, this will almost make me young again. You deserve her, Tresham. Isabelle’s a jewel of a girl—a noble girl, though I say it, that should not. But we mustn’t have you walking off with her to your campaignings, on your foreign service; no, nor to your far-away English abodes. Ye must just make up your mind to live with me here; or, faith, I’ll live with you, and—ye love the Highlands, man—by the hand o’ my father! ye shall have enough of them then—hey?—”

“I dare say, my dear sir,” said Tresham, smiling at the old gentleman’s simple eagerness, and

the singular rapidity with which he jumped to conclusions, overlooking all preliminary arrangements—"I dare say all that may be easily settled; but, in the meantime, are there not some matters which call for previous adjustment? Your daughter, my dear sir, has taken grievous alarm at the subject of the conversation she had with you the night before last. You gave her reason to dread that you had become seriously involved with Mr. Macaskill, of Ballytully, and his Edinburgh uncle; in fact, that you were very much in their power. Now, Isabelle has positively refused to listen to me upon those subjects which are nearest my heart, until she shall have been set at ease; or at least shall have been made acquainted with the nature of these involvements."

The laird started; his face assumed an air of extreme perplexity. He rubbed his forehead with his hand for a while, and at last recovered his recollection and articulation together.

"Poor dear Belle—she's a kind hearted darling," said he, "thinks of every one before herself. But she hates that Ballytully sorely; aye, she can't abide him; and faith, she has some cause. But I hope things are not so bad; I hope it's not so bad. And for Tom Macaskill, I'm sure he'll no be ill to deal with; I'm satisfied of that."

"Well, so much the better, sir; but in the mean while would it not be as well to know how the case actually stands? to ascertain the nature

and extent of your difficulties? The sooner that is done, the sooner may the remedy be found and applied."

"Aye—certainly, certainly; but that may not be so easy a job."

"Why not, sir?—surely you have got regular accounts of your transactions with these people?"

"Accounts!—aye, cart loads of them, I dare say; but I can't say I ever looked much at them. I never was very fond of that kind of work—and, faith, I scarcely know where they have got to. But they must be to the fore, for I was particular about keeping them. I mind, once, old Grizzly wanted a lot of them to singe the fowls wi', and I caught a jad of a lass carrying off a lapfull to light the fires with; but I gave her a hearing, and I got hould of them all; and they were put by some place or other, so that they must be to the fore, although I could not swear to where they are."

"What? have you never examined them, sir? Then how can you know how you may stand with Macaskill, after all?"

"O, ye see I left the matter entirely to Tom Macaskill himself, who is my agent. He's an excellent man of business, Tom; and an honest fellow too—at least I'm fain to believe it, though I fear his nephew is not so worthy as I thought, or as he should be."

"Indeed, sir, I wish it may prove as you say; for if it's like nephew, like uncle, I fear you're in sad hands."

“Why, what can you know of Ballytully, my boy, more than as ye may have seen him in this house, and that not very much neither? For my own part, although there are some things about him of late that I don’t like, I can’t say that I have any matter of fact evil to lay to his charge—have you? I’ve heard you sometimes give him a wiper, as if you didn’t like him; but do you know any thing positively wrong about his conduct?”

The old gentleman said this in the tone of a man who has his shrewd suspicions on a subject, yet is somewhat surprised to find them confirmed by another opinion, and wishes to elicit further information. But Tresham did not choose to be very communicative. “Perhaps I may, sir; but leave that to me. If you would only try to get hold of these accounts; I am not much of a man of business, but I think I could make out a plain statement: at all events, we could get them properly examined. Could not you find them, sir? Do try.”

“Why, faith, Harry, I may try; but as for finding them just at a moment’s warning, that’s impossible. I have not seen the most of them for years, if the truth must be told: they are somewhere in an old box, I believe; but we’ll have a search, and we’ll see what can be made of them. I would do a great deal to please Belle and you, my boy; but to examine long accounts is too

much out of my line, I'm fear'd—but we'll see about it."

But it was an unfortunate juncture for such unpalatable tasks. The Christmas festivities were just commencing, and Glenvallich and his mother, with one or two other guests who had been invited to spend some days of that merry season, came to Airdruthmore. And there was shooting and ten-killing parties, and walking expeditions, among the gentry; and matches at the foot-ball and *shinty*, and shooting at marks, among the peasantry, and sliding on the ice, and pelting with snow-balls, among the young fry. And there were cakes and buns, and short bread and wine in the parlour, and whisky and ale and bread and cheese in abundance in the hall, and there was dancing in drawing-room and kitchen, and pipes and fiddles and all sorts of music, resounded through the walls of Airdruthmore. Alas! who that heard that merry din, and the carol and the song and the shout; and that saw the blythe faces that uttered them, could have imagined that danger and distress overhung that happy home,—that sorrow and dismay would soon displace the innocent mirth and happiness that reigned there?

A blythe old year's eve—*hogmenay*, as it is elegantly termed in Scotland—had passed away in the customary festivities, and one and all of the assembled guests had welcomed in the new year with a shout and a song, according to the ancient and

approved form ; and the gentlemen had claimed the privilege of the hour to kiss their fair partners, and Tresham's lips had, perhaps for the first time, (for we love not too curiously to pry into these matters,) touched those of his lovely mistress. The party had separated for some hours of quiet repose, to wake on the morrow to new sports and pleasures ; and the snowy landscape glittered in the bright sunshine, and the keen frosty air teemed with bracing vigour. Breakfast—a highland and a *new year's* breakfast—was over, and the party had risen from table, to decide upon the several modes of spending the forenoon. There was to be a grand match at football between the two sides of the glen, and both ladies and gentlemen proposed to view the strife, the prize for which was to be a hearty dinner, and a *quantum suff.* of whisky-punch, the latter to be furnished from the stores of Airdruthmore. And the ladies had retired to put on bonnets and tippets and furs, and walking shoes, and the gentlemen were buckling on their gaiters and leggins, or lounging about the fire—when the post-bag was brought in as usual, and handed to the laird.

In a Highland glen, remote from towns and the more frequented thoroughfares of the country, and before the full influence of the present admirable system for the transmission of letters and intelligence had pervaded the more distant districts, the arrival of a post-bag was by no means an event of

such mechanical regularity as it has now become ; but for that very reason, probably, it was then an occurrence of greater interest. On the present occasion, the laird was immediately surrounded by claimants of letters and newspapers ; and the rustling of paper resounding through the room, speedily hushed, as it were, the buz of voices which just before had filled it.

A very small share of this precious packet fell to the share of the laird himself ; but it did not seem to be an unimportant one. It was a single letter ; and Tresham, who from some accidental or involuntary impulse, had glanced at the old gentleman as he took it up, saw his cheek colour, and his brow contract slightly as he looked at the superscription. This agitation augmented during its perusal : the flush of displeasure grew darker, and when he had finished reading it, he struck the paper against his knee with an exclamation of which nothing was audible except—" A pretty fellow, by my certie !" The curiosity of Tresham was too keenly awake to be satisfied without some inquiry into the nature of a communication that had produced so unusual an effect upon the placid temper of the laird. Convinced that it was, in some shape or other, connected with the impending embarrassments, he took a speedy opportunity of accosting the old gentleman with an expression of his hope " that he had received no disagreeable news ?"

" News !—faith, I need scarcely call it news ;

and yet, who would have thought it of Tom Macaskill !—Read, lad, read ; it 'ill all be out and public soon enough, I fancy.” With a beating and a boding heart, Tresham took the letter, which proved to be a missive under the hand of the worthy Mr. Thomas Macaskill himself: it ran as follows :

“ Edinburgh, 28 Dec. 18—

“ MY DEAR AIRDRUTHMORE,

“ I should not have troubled you with a letter at this time, (although I willingly embrace the opportunity of wishing yourself and family the compliments of the season,) but that I have just heard from my nephew, who writes me under great perplexity and grief. He tells me, that he has left Airdruthmore *for ever*, being, as he asserts, little better than *turned out of doors*, by yourself and your daughter, (although I can scarcely believe this either of you or Miss Isabelle ;) and all because he, very naturally, poor fellow, pressed you and her to conclude, at your earliest convenience, the engagement which has so long subsisted between ourselves, of uniting Rory to your daughter in marriage. My own firm opinion is, that the lad has been silly and bashful, and that he has mistaken a little maidenly coyness for a refusal which was never intended ; for I am sure, Airdruthmore, you are too much a man of your word to recede from a promise you have so often repeated, and from an

arrangement which would be so beneficial to all parties, particularly to the Airdruthmore family, as it affords a prospect (which I have no objection to confirm) of recovering, in a certain shape, an important portion of its former estate: nay, failing one life, (that of your *son*, I mean,) of re-annexing it to the original property. I hope to hear from you soon in reply to this, with a positive denial of what my nephew has affirmed, and an assurance that you and Miss Isabelle are willing to conclude your engagements both to him and to me.

“ I am the more anxious for a speedy and satisfactory communication on this subject, as the settlements must include certain other arrangements of a very important nature to us both. Times are hard, money is scarce, and the bills you have drawn upon me for late heavy outlays *must* be provided for. By the enclosed sketch of account, made up prospectively to the 31st inst., you will see that the heavy balance due me, has so greatly increased within the past year, that a settlement becomes imperatively called for. I mention this for your government; very unwilling should I be to put you to inconvenience; and should you be disposed immediately to implement the family contract, for which I have already received your pledge, an amicable adjustment of accounts will not be difficult.

“ I purpose being in your part of the country

on some business of my nephew's, in the course of ten days, when I shall not fail of making my bow at Airdruthmore, and then I hope every thing may be arranged *viva voce*, even better than by letter.

“ I remain, dear Airdruthmore,

“ Your faithful and obedient servant,

“ THOMAS MACASKILL.”

P. S. “ I have heard that there is a young fellow, an Englishman, a friend of your neighbour Glenvallich's, much with you at Airdruthmore. My nephew Rory was a good deal disgusted with his forwardness, and the fulsome manner in which he *foyed* about Miss Isabelle. He says the circumstance was much noticed in the country. I mention this for your own government—*verbum sat*—a word to the wise.”

The coarse, unceremonious tone of this epistle betrayed the confidence felt by its writer, that the victim was safe in his toils; too completely ensnared and hampered to leave a chance of extrication: for the wily man of law would never have abandoned his habitual caution, nor deviated so widely from the courteous humility which generally characterized the style of his customary correspondence with a valuable client. But it was also clear that he felt no time was to be lost in bringing matters to a close, and thus forcing the laird

into a connexion, which would unite the family interests and throw the property entirely into his power, or compelling him to a ruinous compromise; a step which Mr. Macaskill assured himself, the old gentleman had not nerve to take.

It was this change of tone, no less than the implied threats contained in the letter of his agent, which nettled the laird and increased suspicions, which we have already seen had previously existed. The mask had been thus partially drawn aside, and permitted the old gentleman to get a peep of the real unseemly features of the man whom he had loved and trusted. Still, however, the generous and confiding nature of the good old gentleman could scarcely credit the full amount of the disclosure.

“And this is your good friend Macaskill, sir?” said Tresham, as he returned the letter; “I think he has let out the cloven foot now, with a witness.”

“Aye, Harry, this is the man who, for thirty years, I have believed to be my friend; and who now, at this pinch, and on a false pretence, turns, like the ass in the fable at the dying lion, and kicks at me. I declare, before heaven, that I am more distressed at my disappointment in the man, than at any loss I may sustain by his acts. Good God! that a man could be so base!—by heavens I can’t believe it! He has been worked upon by that vile scapegrace, his nephew. Tom Macas-

kill, of himself, would never have treated me so. Ah, woe's me!—it's a bad account of human nature this !”

“I would not have you think worse of human nature than it deserves, sir,” replied Tresham, who pitied the old gentleman's distress, although he deplored the too palpable weakness he betrayed ; “but I would have you guard against imposition, particularly in a quarter where we have already cause for suspicion. Depend upon it, whatever concessions this same Macaskill might offer would be dearly bought. At all events, a strict investigation of accounts is what no honest man need dread, or should shun ; and when we learn exactly how we stand, we shall best know how to act with him, and for ourselves. Pardon me, my dear sir, for the liberty I take in speaking of this matter, as one in which I am deeply interested. I hope you will suffer me to consider myself as one of your family, and allow me to act as if I were so.”

“My dear Tresham—my dear boy—you are very kind—I do—I will ! I feel that I am weak—that I should very probably continue the dupe I may have been, were I left to myself. For Isabelle's sake—for that of my absent boy, my poor, dear William, who must suffer so deeply—for your own sake, act as you see best. I will do what I can. Let us try to repair the mischief I have done, and get my poor bairns out of this

scrape. As for my old carcass, little does it matter what becomes of it—the sooner it is laid with those that are gone, I doubt it will be the better for those that remain. I have taken far too little thought of these matters, and those I love best will be the sufferers.”

Tresham was greatly moved, for tears were standing in the old man's eyes as he said this. “Don't say so, my dear sir,” said he, taking the good laird's hand; “I trust in God, you will live long and happily to receive the affectionate attentions of your children, and be a blessing to them; and I trust that your brave and worthy son will suffer little through the machinations of the wicked against his father. For his sake—for Isabelle's sake—for all our sakes, cheer up then: God knows I would risk life and fortune to serve or comfort you. Come, take courage, sir! we shall soon see daylight through this ugly squall, I trust.”

“Thank you, my dear boy—I—pshah!—this is foolish!” and the old gentleman, fairly overcome, gave full way to his agitation.

“You may well think me an old fool,” said he, after a minute's pause; “but when I think of all that has passed—it's a bitter thing to see friends prove false. But you, my dear Harry, will stick by me, and take care of Isabelle, when my grey head is laid in its long resting-place.”

“Long and late may that be, my dear sir,” said Tresham, almost equally affected; “but on me

you may depend ; you have good security for my fidelity and zeal. But, in the mean time, this letter must be answered ; and measures should be taken for qualifying ourselves to meet the writer, when he makes his appearance. Don't let us mar the sport to-day ; to-morrow, if you please, we shall make a search for the documents we want. If they are forthcoming, well ; if not, Macaskill cannot refuse to furnish them at our request. In the mean time, I shall consider what further ought to be done—I may consult with Isabelle, of course, sir ?”

“Certainly, Harry ; and, faith, you will find her head and judgment worth two of mine.”

The day was passed in the purposed amusements ; the evening closed in with mirth and revelry ;—but Tresham, who felt how important a part he had taken upon him, spent much of it, and stole many hours from sleep, to ponder over the fittest and most prudent course to be pursued. Two points were obviously and imperatively necessary ;—to ascertain exactly the nature and amount of Macaskill's claims upon Airdruthmore, and having done so, to make the best final settlement which circumstances might admit of, so as to clear the laird and his estate for ever from the clutches of the W. S.

Tresham was not much of a man of business ; but his head was clear, his judgment sound, and he had a straightforward sense, that seldom failed

of going directly to the point. He knew that if, as he anticipated, there was a long and complicated series of accounts to be examined, in which a false entry, whether wilful or accidental, might lead to serious consequences, he could not alone be competent to such a task ; and the more he considered the subject, the more did he feel the necessity of securing aid and advice, even in taking the preliminary steps. Impressed with this conviction, on the succeeding morning he took the earliest opportunity of talking the matter over with Isabelle, to whom he communicated all that had passed between himself and her father, the occurrence of the preceding day, and his own view of the case.

“ I am far from wishing, my dear Isabelle, to presume on any thing that may have passed between us, or upon the urgency of present circumstances, in what I am now going to propose ; for believe me, when I declare, that my chief object at present is to see your excellent father freed from the power of a man, whom I have too good reason to think an arrant rogue. I trust you will sanction the power he has given me to act for him, and that you will aid me with your advice and assistance. But as neither of us can be equal, I fear, to cope with practised and technical roguery, I consider it as highly important to call in a coadjutor. I have considered the subject well ; I feel all the delicacy of the case ;—and this is what I propose, and request you to acquiesce in. You know my friend

Glenvallich—nay, I pray you hear me out—he has a cool, collected judgment ; he is an excellent and experienced man of business ; and, I pledge myself, a sincere, an upright, and a most friendly young man. He loves and respects your father, and, I am confident, would act, in his affairs, as for a brother or a father. Now do not permit your good sense to be alarmed or silenced by an over-scrupulous delicacy ; permit me to explain to Glenvallich, *in confidence*, the terms on which I now stand in this family—I owe it to him as my friend ; and his own sense of delicacy and honour are too nice to render that confidence in the slightest degree embarrassing. This will be necessary, in order to explain to him the cause of my own interference. I conjure you to consent to this measure, which pledges you to nothing, for I shall be most candid in every thing ; and you know,” added he smiling, “you have not yet suffered me to be too secure myself.”

Miss Stewart, distressed as she was, perceived too clearly the good sense, nay, the expediency, of what Tresham proposed. She yielded a blushing consent, which added fresh vigour to his exertions. “A thousand thanks, my dear Isabelle,” said he ; “thus aided, I shall go to work with confidence, and I feel that we shall baffle the Macaskills yet.”

This point being settled, Tresham took the earliest opportunity of opening the subject to his friend. The success which had attended his own

suit met with full sympathy from that gentleman.

“I congratulate you, my dear Harry, most sincerely, on the progress you have made. It has been a rapid one, faith, since we talked the matter over at the bothy in Breulach; as rapid as your march from thence: but I am sure you will hail it hereafter as the happiest forced march you ever made in your life; for, believe me, you will find few women, roam where you may, superior to Isabelle Stewart. Tastes differ, you know; and perhaps I could name some that happen to hit my fancy, in certain points, more than her; you won’t cut my throat for that, I hope; but in sterling worth and essential goodness, and all the most valuable qualities of the female heart, I know none who surpass your mistress.

“As to the business of the honest laird, her father, I am sorry for it, indeed, but it is scarcely news to me; I have long dreaded something wrong in that quarter; I told you as much, I think. But I am ready to do whatever lies in my power, and not the less readily, Hal, you may believe, that *you* are so much interested. Something may possibly be effected after this explosion; but hitherto it was useless to warn him. His hatred of accounts, and partiality for his friend Tom, was such as to exclude all external aid from others. I wish the case may not be too far gone now to admit of any effectual interference.”

“Aye, but as we have a hank over the nephew, may we not hope to deal with the uncle on better terms?”

“Assuredly; it is a very important point in our favour, but it is one we must use with great caution and discretion, to make it carry due weight; and, above all, it must be kept a dead secret until the proper time for bringing it into play.”

“Why, do not you think that the mere knowledge of the facts we are in possession of against his nephew will dispose the old writer to come to terms?”

“I don’t know that; I know Mr. Thomas Macaskill, at least by character, and there is not a more sly old fox in the profession. If he were once to suspect the existence of so fatal a proof against the credit of his nephew, he is so much a man of the world that he would instantly throw him off, ostensibly at least, and thus disembarass himself of the obloquy of the connexion. Now I feel pretty confident that, so far from the uncle being ignorant of his nephew’s proceedings, he is not only cognizant of them, but also in part connected with them, and I hope we may discover the link that connects them.”

“That would be a grand *coup* indeed; but I fear we have nothing yet to lead to such a proof.”

“I don’t know; but if we hope for a chance of obtaining it we must keep silence; they will probably imagine that the missing papers have been burned in the hut, and we can choose our time for

bringing our masked battery against them when thus thrown off their guard, with full effect."

"Upon my word, that is well conceived; I see you are an able tactician—I think we shall *do* them yet; but what must first be done now?"

"Why, the first object must be to discover the amount of Airdruthmore's embarrassments, and that, I fear, may be no easy matter through any other means than an application to Macaskill himself. The old gentleman should collect his papers as you advised, and his thoughts too, as far as they will help him; and from these something of a statement should be made out."

"Yes, but who is to do that? I am too little *au fait* at such matters."

"O, we shall manage it. When we see a little further into the affair, we can call in the assistance of my own man of business, Oswald, a shrewd, clever, *honest* fellow, whose sound sense will match their cunning, I warrant. But you said Macaskill talks of being soon here."

"Yes; in about ten days."

"Well, I am obliged to be at Inverallich for a week or so, but I should like to be here when he comes, and I will make a point of being so. We must not leave the old gentleman to the influence of his old habits of friendship and confidence, or of the oily tongue of the W. S. These sharp men of business are always punctual: Macaskill is more likely to anticipate his time than to overstep it. He will like to have the first of the laird to himself—to

take him unprepared and unattended by all or any interlopers—but he sha'n't find him so; I will leave this to-morrow, and be back a day or two before the appointed time; there is no fear of *your* playing truant, Tresham?"

"No; I shall remain at my post, assuredly."

"Do so, and in the interval try to collect what documents, vouchers, information, you can; we shall then meet this doughty man of law and letters, and hear his own tale from his own mouth. If we find him fair and willing to accommodate, why we can tender him the olive; if obstinate and pugnacious, the sword is aye forthcoming, and he shall find we can use it with a vengeance."

There remained but to reply to Mr. Macaskill's letter, and this was done very briefly, somewhat contrary to the feeling of the old gentleman, who would have fain given vent to a portion of his indignation upon paper. The letter simply acknowledged that to which it was a reply, returned its civilities, and acquiesced in the opinion of the writer, that a verbal arrangement of differences would be most conducive to an amicable settlement of differences. The tone, which was more dry than usual, was intended to convey to the *agent* a sort of intimation of displeasure on the part of his employer, and to the *friend* a sense of the disappointment which had been excited in the breast of his ancient ally by the unlooked-for and discourteous procedure he had adopted.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTERVIEW, AND A FULL LENGTH PORTRAIT.

“ I crave the law ;
The penalty and forfeit of my bond.”

THE succeeding week passed quietly enough away. The *Daft-days* were over, and the guests were gone. Tresham alone remained, and, eager in his new office, continually pressed the laird to make search for the required documents. It was an uphill and disheartening task ; for though Airdruthmore was by this time sufficiently roused to action, settled habits were not easily altered, and he could not bring his mind to bear upon a subject which he had shunned so long that it had not only become hateful but forgotten. To ask him therefore for information concerning it, was like demanding the fig from the briar, or grapes from thorns ; it was not there, and therefore was sought in vain. After much rummaging among a chaos of old

papers, torn letters, grocers' bills, farm accounts, and the like, some of Macaskill's accounts were actually ferretted out, and good swinging ones they were, such as would have made some men of business stare, and others lick their lips, at the very thoughts of so capital a milch cow in the shape of a client. But they were chiefly subsidiary documents, notes of particular jobs, borrowings of money, charges of taking infestments, accounts of general agency, &c. &c. Only one solitary account-current was discovered, and that in a mutilated state, and not of recent date. But even the sum total, though abundantly alarming, conveyed no accurate impression of the state of matters at the time, for there was appended to it a long list of dependencies, *pro* and *con*; some dubious, others pressing, and so forth, but all calculated to influence the balance in a material but not certain manner.

In this fruitless and disheartening search, Tresham was cheered by the countenance and assistance of his lovely mistress, who, grateful for the deep and zealous interest he evinced, and the activity he displayed in a matter so near her own feelings, could not avoid bestowing upon him marks of confidence and kindness, the more precious as they betrayed the truth and sincerity of her own attachment. The greater part of a week had elapsed without any greater progress than what we have already mentioned; and Tresham had begun to fear that he should have but a bar-

ren account to render of the result of his labours, when his ancient ally, old Grizzly Mac Farlane, who at length began to comprehend the nature of the quest which was turning the house upside down, called to mind, that on one occasion, not many years before, when a great riddance had been made of the accumulated trash, which every one knows, will collect in a country-house—a number of boxes and barrels, and old broken utensils, had been removed from a garret in the house, to a lock-up sort of loft above one of the stables. The garret had been wanted for additional servants' accommodation, and its contents of lumber were trundled off higgledy-piggledy to this same loft. "I dinna ken what there's o' it," said Grizzly, "but there's a hantle o' trashery, that's certain; and I mind there was a wheen ould rags and papers. It's a long time since any one was there, I'm thinking;—no' since they went to kill the wild cat that worried the doo's—the nesty baist made its hole in an ould box, an' the laads had enough ado to get it kill't."

The hint was sufficient. Away went Tresham on this new scent; and ten minutes saw him half smothered in the dust and dirt of the said old loft, surrounded by a most heterogeneous collection of worthless lumber. The cat of which Grizzly spoke, appeared to have bequeathed in legacy or in revenge, to the place, its progeny of many generations—at least if any faith was to be placed

upon the evidence of *one* sense: but here, as in the ark of Noah, it seemed that animals of the most opposite habits were forced into peaceable union; for they had both ocular and auricular testimony in abundance, that multitudes of mice formed also a portion of its inmates. Boxes indeed were there in no sparing quantity; trunks, bald and infirm from age, maimed stools and benches past service; chairs without bottoms, and tables without legs.

“Feech!—feech!” exclaimed old Grizzly, as lanthorn in hand she entered this obscene receptacle, this melancholy hospital of diseased moveables;—“pity me! what a stink! what a stouse!—Oove, oove! we’ll a’ be chokit!—here, Maister Traisham—I’m thinking they’re here—O gracious!” ejaculated she, as tumbling heels over head, she almost disappeared among a wreck of rotten fragments of nondescript matter, mingled up with an uncommon quantity of filth and dust, which rose round her like a dense exhalation. “O mercy me! I’m dead—I’m through the loft!”—and indeed, the rapid sinking of the poor woman’s voice as she continued to roar for assistance, did seem to indicate some such catastrophe.

With somewhat more of caution, Tresham advanced to her aid; first picked up the lanthorn, as it lay grievously singeing its own horn; and then with as much decency and care as the case

admitted of, extricated poor Grizzy from the mass of confusion in which she had so ingeniously contrived to entangle herself. It was some time before the old housekeeper regained her self-possession, nor was it till she had shook herself well, like a spaniel coming out of the water—spit and sputtered abundantly, and stood panting with her hand at her side for more than a minute, that she yielded to the soothing condolences of Tresham, and proceeded anew to guide him in his search.

The first object pointed out by Grizzy, was an old pye-bald hair trunk, which “the Lord ken’t what was in it, but papers and trash eneugh there was, she was sure.” Time which, as well as love, “laughs at locksmiths,” had superseded all need of either smith or key—if indeed such an appendage had ever belonged to the repertory; for the hasp was rusted to the lock, and both together fell out from the worm-eaten wood, on being touched. This capacious crypt was soon removed down stairs, by the help of the stable-boys; and another deal box, of less dimensions, soon followed it. “I dinna ken if there’s any thing there,” said Grizzy, pointing to a very ancient looking, and very mutilated concern, which, glimmering through accumulated dust and cobwebs, presented the semblance of an old walnut-tree escritoire. “I mind, lang syne, that my master used to leuk intill that thing, an’ write at it whiles: but whan my ould mistress—God bless

an' sain her!—cam' here—a bonny blythe bride she was, an' fair to see, an' as gude as bonny—ochone for the day that she was ta'en awa'—whan she cam' home to Airdruthmore, nothing coud serve the laird, but new furniture; and the ould aumrie,* an' this ould dask, an' a hantle o' ould things more, was turned out; an' some were sould, and others gi'en awa'—but this was ow'r worthless—or I'm thinking the laird didna like to pairt wi' it clean awa'—for it was his father's, honest man. So it was sent here wi' the lumber, and here it has stayed ever since: an' I'm no' thinking, it was ripet when they teuk it awa'—maybe there's things in it yet." Tresham thought this possible also; so the order was given; but the crazy old machine fell almost to pieces in the operation of removal. The attempt was however not fruitless; the top, and drawers, displayed a very promising mass of papers, in something like better order than those in the other repertories. So putting the whole into a capacious basket, he marched off with his prize, panting for breath, and covered from head to heel with cobwebs and dust, the tokens of his strenuous but successful search.

We have heard of some West India functionary of former days, who when called upon, by the authorities appointed to investigate his accounts, to produce his vouchers, sent *ten* waggon loads

* Wardrobe.

of musty fusty papers, intimating, that those were *a part* of what he had upon the subject, and that, when they had satisfied themselves, by a full investigation of *these*, he had just three times as much more at their service. Something analogous to this appalling denunciation presented itself in prospect to Tresham, when he viewed the aggregate of ragged, crumpled, worm-eaten, dust-covered papers, which, after they were all extricated from their repositories, and had undergone a first hearty shaking, were spread before his eyes, upon the floor of the apartment where the examination was to take place. Human nature almost sickened at the depressing and ungrateful task; but love—stronger than death—friendship, pride, and a generous sense of duty to those who relied upon his efforts, aroused his shrinking virtue, and urged him to the work. Taking advantage of the quiet morning hours, he began, in the first place, to examine the contents of the trunk. These were as heterogeneous as the mass of papers he had encountered in the house; but ere he had worked an hour, his heart was cheered by the sight of a prize. It was a bundle, once neatly made up, though now crumpled and torn, which, on being opened, proved to be a series of the very accounts current they wanted, tied up with several account-sales referred to, of parcels of wool, wood, &c. from the Airdruthmore estate.

Little as Tresham knew of regular mercantile

accounts, he saw that the whole of these must prove interesting, if not positively useful, and he recommenced with a more strict and regular plan of search. Hundreds of letters there were, the common daily correspondence of the time, possessing neither use nor interest, and these were thrown by themselves into a separate receptacle, while all that bore semblance of an account or voucher, was separately and carefully disposed of. By dint of application, and a full day's labour, Tresham found he had made a progress which astonished himself, and that he had even attained to something like a comprehension of the subject he was investigating. The reward of his perseverance was a visit from the fair Isabelle, whose heart, touched by her lover's zeal, could not refrain from bestowing on him a few words of warmer thanks and encouragement than she had yet permitted herself to breathe; and when Tresham, in the overflowing of his affection, made so free with the fair hand, as to bestow upon it a tolerably full portion of kisses, it is certain that the freedom met with no distinct repulse, although his mistress, gently extricating herself, made a speedy retreat, as if to avoid the possible chance of a still more daring familiarity.

The further labours of the young Englishman, however, suffered a temporary suspension; for on the evening of the very day they commenced, the family, and Tresham in particular, were delighted

by the arrival of Glenvallich, just in time for dinner. The curiosity of that gentleman being excited by what was told him of the discovery of papers in the loft, on the following morning, immediately after breakfast, he accompanied his friend to the room where they lay: but their examination was speedily interrupted by the arrival of a handsome gig which drove up to the door, and out of which descended the portly form of Mr. Thomas Macaskill, W. S. of Edinburgh.

Securing their precious deposit under lock and key, Glenvallich and Tresham hastened to the drawing-room; into which the newly arrived guest was ushered, and the latter saw, for the first time, a person of whom he had lately heard so much. The impression made by Mr. Macaskill's first appearance was certainly not the most prepossessing. He was a tall, raw-boned man, somewhat heavy of make, and stooping withal. A face made up of coarse features; a large fleshy nose, a wide mouth, with a hanging under-lip, in which four yellow fangs alone could be seen to do duty as teeth, were surmounted by a large retiring forehead, which merged in the bare crown. Eyes of an equivocal tint of grey, in one of which a slight cast might be detected, lay half hid under a pair of immense bushy brows, of the same fiery colour as his fierce whiskers, and the semi-grizzled locks which still garnished each side of his head, uniting only at the back of the neck, and leaving the

rest of the scalp utterly bald. The scar of a severe hurt received in youth disfigured one cheek, and increased the somewhat sinister scowl which characterized the *tout ensemble* of the countenance when in repose: but when its owner became animated by the wish of attaining some favourite object, or sought to please his auditors, he contrived to throw a blandness into his smile which produced a striking change of expression; and although an acute observer might be startled by a certain unconscious leer of the half-closed eye, his physiognomy at such times became actually not displeasing. In person, Mr. Thomas Macaskill, like many men of business of that day, was somewhat of a sloven. He wore an ill-brushed black coat, and a rusty black waistcoat, begrimed, as well as his neckcloth, with snuff, which he took in quantities. Above his corduroy inexpressibles and grey worsted stockings, he wore overalls to protect him from cold on the journey, and his form was enveloped in an ample great coat. Such were the externals of the personage which the laird of Airdruthmore now introduced to the two gentlemen, as his friend, Mr. Thomas Macaskill.

The habitual scowl of the W. S. was by no means diminished, when the name of the young Englishman struck upon the tympanum of his ear; but his blandest smile was instantly at the service of the laird of Glenvallich, the actual pos-

essor of ten thousand a-year landed property, and he looked on him with all that longing complacency, with which a fat epicurean alderman may be supposed to gloat upon a rich turbot, or the starved hungry Frenchman in Bunbury's caricature is made to view the savory *ros-bif* of John Bull.

Courteous hospitality on the part of Airdruthmore, and policy, if not decency on that of the man of law, prevented any decided introduction of business into the conversation of that day; but Macaskill could not refrain from giving vent to several inuendoes and allusions to the subject nearest his heart; and before retiring for the night, he took occasion to observe to the laird, that he hoped he had been considering the matter which had formed the subject of his last letter, more fully than the short reply it had received appeared to promise; and that in the conference on *business*, which he must crave with him after breakfast on the following morning, a mutual disposition would be found for promoting the amicable arrangement he anticipated; and that the ancient friendship which had so long subsisted between the families would suffer no disturbance. The laird writhed a little under the threat of this formidable conference; he looked round at his coadjutors, took courage from their presence, although out of ear-shot, promised the meeting, agreed in the pious wish of the agent for a con-

tinuance of amicable relations, and waved further discussion by joining the rest of the party.

Shrinking under the dread of this impending conference, the laird with an anxious heart sought his two friends, to consult with them upon the plan or precautions to be adopted in meeting their formidable antagonist. Both gentlemen, Glenvallich in particular, would willingly have avoided taking so prominent a part in the discussion, as the utter incapacity of their friend in matters of business was likely to impose upon them : but they saw the danger of leaving him to himself at so critical a stage of the negociation, and sacrificed their own feelings to the expediency of the case. It was arranged, however, that they should not appear, except the old gentleman should feel himself hard pressed upon points which he might be unequal to reply to.

The morrow came, and after a breakfast which the honest laird prolonged beyond the longest customary period of the most oppressive hospitality, he was forced to leave the table in obedience to the formal requisition of the man of law ; and he withdrew, casting such a rueful look at his allies, as a schoolboy sent like a forlorn hope by his comrades, on an orchard-robbing ploy, throws backward at the rest of the party to see whether they are at his heels or no.

Arrived at the parlour, the door of which was cautiously shut by Macaskill, the laird made a

bold effort to appear at ease ; and requesting his old friend to be seated, rubbed his hands before the fire with affected glee, spoke of the fineness of the weather, hoped that January might be as civil as December, that the new year might be as blythe as the old had been, &c. &c.

“ I am glad ye have found it a blythe one, Airdruthmore ; I doubt if all your friends will say as much, and I was feared it might have been otherwise with yourself in some things.”

“ O, ye’re thinking of the floods and the damage we had here wi’ them, Tom, but I’m no the man to fret about by-gones—what can’t be cured must be endured, ye ken ; where would be the good of complaining of what I can’t help ? I have many blessings to be thankful for, man.”

“ I’m well pleased to hear it, laird ; as for the damage, it’s no muckle ye have felt their effects yet ; those who have found ye the means of repairing mischief and replacing losses ken more about them than you, and that’s just old Tom Macaskill ; but some folks have little thought but of themselves, and can cast off an old friend as easy as an old coat, when a new one comes to hand ;—aye, and never feel their heart an unce the heavier.”

“ Aye, Tom ; a heavy charge that ; but who’s to bear it ? if ye’re minting at me, the cap won’t fit at all, man ; not one word of truth in it, I’ll take heaven to witness.”

“ No’ a word o’ truth in it, Airdruthmore ? I

would fain see how ye'll make out that, when there's my poor nephew Roderick, your old friend, turned frae your door, sent off wi' a flee in his lug, just because he sought for what he thought was his own. He's one that would have stuck by ye through fire and water, fair weather or foul; let us see if your fine flashy English brikie will do as much."

"Tom Macaskill, ye accuse me without cause; never was your nephew sent away from this house, either foully or fairly. He left it sore against my will and all our wills, in a fit of senseless anger, when I thought he might far better have stayed."

"Left it of himself? Aye, when it grew too cold for him to bide in—when he found his room would be better liked than his company—when he saw himself elbowed out by a d--d fleetching English sorner."

"Ye're less than civil, Tom, to say the word. Mr. Tresham is no sorner; nor had Ballytully any reason to complain of his conduct, or that of any one in this house."

"No reason? what call ye no reason, Airdruthmore? Did he not see him seeking to undermine him in a friend's favour? Was he not striving to wyle away the very woman that he looked upon as little less than his contracted wife?"

"What reason Ballytully may have fancied he had for looking on Belle as such, if it's Belle ye mean, I'm sure I don't know. It never was from me

he had it, and surely not from the poor girl herself. And as for my favour, Tom, it's open to any one that deserves it, be he Scotch, English. or Irish."

"Look ye, John Stewart; I'm a plain man, and I don't understand fine speeches, or explanations, or mental reservations. Ye have known me now for more than thirty years, and if I have na been a good friend to you, it's for you to say so this moment. Answer me then; how have you found me acting towards you for all that time, if it's no' as a fast friend?"

"Why, certainly, Tom Macaskill, I have aye looked upon you as a friend, and many friendly offices I'm sùre I have to thank you for. I never was backward to acknowledge this; and why ye now back-spear me in such a way, or seem to misdoubt my conduct to you or yours, it's no' me that can tell. It's yourself I should ask why ye're a changed man; for sure enough it's a changed style ye're using wi' me now, and in your last letter to me."

"If it be, Airdruthmore, it's yourself ye have to thank for it. And now I'll ask ye, sir, is it no' true that long, long ago, I proposed to form a close connexion between the families, and suggested that if it should please God to spare your daughter, Miss Isabelle, to come to woman's estate, and that my nephew Roderick should likewise be spared to see it, it would be desirable that these two should be united in the bands of wed-

lock? And did not you, John Stewart, receive this proposition, as it was made, in good part, and agree to the implied contract? Answer me to these questions fairly and openly, without reserve or mental equivocation."

The countenance of the honest laird, sufficiently betrayed the uneasiness which he suffered during the first part of this direct appeal, and which his conscience told him he had merited; and he would probably have experienced some difficulty in framing a suitable reply to parry the attack. But the discourteous vehemence of the writer over-shot its mark, and rousing his slumbering indignation, forced out a more spirited retort than his antagonist anticipated. "Thomas Macaskill," said he, with cheeks kindling with an honest glow, "ye have asked of me a question, and ye have thought fit to caution me against unfairness or equivocation in my reply. Neither of these are very much in my way, and neither shall ye hear from my lips. It is true that ye proposed, first, as I certainly took it, more in joke than earnest, a connexion between my daughter, then a perfect child, and your nephew, then a young man. I laughed at it—it was too extravagant and too remote to be treated gravely. The girl grew, so did the lad; and ye renewed the subject. Even at this next occasion, it was too distant a chance to look forward to with much seriousness; but I saw the lad and liked him. I thought, if they like each other,

why not? but there is a mighty difference between their ages, so we shall not interfere—force her I will not—gainsay her I would not. I believe that I ought to have made you more fully aware of these my sentiments, and so much of the blame, if blame there be, as this comes to, I am willing to bear; but I do solemnly deny any direct understanding, any agreement, any contract, implied or professed, that could bind either me or my daughter to your nephew, against her own will. Isabelle is now a woman, capable of judging for herself; she has seen and known your nephew; he has professed himself her admirer; she has declined his addresses, and there, I take it, is an end of the matter.”

“Is there, by the Lord! we’ll see that, man—saul and body, John Stewart, take ye me for a man to be fooled and scorned at this gait? Think ye that my nephew is to have his heart broken, and myself to have all my plans, founded on your own words and consent, blown up by the dorts o’ a lassie or the wheemsies o’ a laird. No, by the Lord, ye’ll find ye’ve mistaken your man! Think ye, John Stewart, weel as I may have liked ye, that I, or any man of business, would have gone the lengths I did for you? no, nor for man of woman born that was not of my own flesh and blood. Think ye I would have run the risks I did, or taken the lift I did, or sorted and shifted, as I was forced to do, for less than the father of her

who was to be my own niece, the wife of the nephew of my love, the representative of my name and family? What agent but myself could have keppit a falling property like this so long? And why did I do all this, but that I set it down as a family affair, and that sooner or later, would tell to the happiness and comfort of the heir of my own blood; and are ye to tell me that I am an old fool, and fancied all this? Na, faith, man, ye may whistle, but it's no' Tom Macaskill that will answer again; ye may laugh in your sleeve just now, man, but I'm thinking ye'll change your tone 'ore long!"

"Mr. Macaskill," said the old man, with increasing indignation, "ye have been pleased to lay to my charge, things which I never once imagined, and never in my life committed towards a friend. You have seen good to place before me a long list of obligations, which I never denied, but which I am fond to believe have neither been unacknowledged nor unrequited. I had held the duties and obligations of agent and client to be reciprocal and mutual: you seem to think they have only been discharged on one part, and have moreover confessed them to have been so performed only from interested motives. This being the case, it is my opinion that they should altogether cease. You may depend upon it, I shall never lay the smallest restraint upon my daughter's conduct or affections, so that your hopes or your plans,

whatever they may have been, so far as she is concerned, are at an end. The consequences, whatever they are, must fall on me ; and, even should they be ruinous, as you seem to threaten, I must encounter them ; so now you have had my answer. But pause awhile, 'Thomas Macaskill ; think before ye seek to bring these same evils on my grey head, what it's for that ye're going to do so—how it will seem in the eyes of men, that because the father would not wrong his child, ye sought to visit him with distress and ruin. Think too, before ye sever a friendship, which as ye said yourself, has lasted more than thirty years ! Friends are no' just so plenty man,"—and the good old laird's voice softened, and his eye grew moist as he spoke, for old feelings had revived in his soul, and smothered the short-lived burst of indignation. " We dinna find them as we get on in life, growing upon every green bush ; the beardless cheek has the world before it, and time to choose its marrow and its mates ; but the grey head must content itself with its own fire-side and the friends it has made in the days that are gone. What though the bairns canna make matters up, their fathers surely need na quarrel. I'm very willing to let this matter rest as it is, and just let us go on in the old fashion, till we end in the grave that neither of us are far from."

· " John Stewart," replied the man of law, with one of his most sarcastic and sinister glares,

but restraining the wrath that was boiling in his breast ; “ John Stewart, ye little ken the man ye have madly abused and provoked. Ye say, let the connexion that was ’atween us cease—be it so—but know ye, that after a feast comes the reckoning ;—ye say ye are prepared for the consequences, do ye guess what these consequences may be ? Are ye aware that it rests upon my word and act, to make you little better than a begger ?—that on me it depends whether the estate of Airdruthmore shall remain with you and go down to your son and his heirs, or be wrested from your hands within the twelvemonth ? Could ye endure to quit the home of your forebears ?—to see your son deprived of his lawful rights, and your daughter expelled from the roof which has hitherto sheltered her father ? Pause *you*, John Stewart, think *you* before you decide.”

“ Think ! pause ! and what for should I do either, Thomas Macaskill. Ye have said enough. Ye have told me, not only that I have no just right to the estate I own, but that *you* are the man to deprive me of it ; if this be true, if I *am* a ruined man, the sooner those I’m indebted to have their own, the less will be their loss ; and the sooner you make good your words, the sooner will your worst be done, and me quit of one that cheated me into a belief that he was my friend. It’s no’ by such threats, Thomas Macaskill, that ye’ll frighten me or make me consent to sell my child. A poor

and a ruined man I may be—a knave or a begger never. I thank God that Isabelle has means, out of your reach or mine, that will save her from any such fate. My son, my poor brave boy, that his thriftless father has ruined with himself, has an honest profession, and, thank God, has gained a name in it; and may be, may meet the false friends of his father with a firmer step than I have done, 'ore all is over. As for this old carcass, if there's no' enough left to keep it in life, it can lay itself down and render up its spirit, without seeking charity or favour from the proud or the cold-hearted. He that feedeth the ravens, man, is above all, and into his hands do I commit my cause."

"Be it so then," said Macaskill with a fiendish grin of affected sarcasm, but smothered rage; "we need have no further words. I presume it is your pleasure to look over this account, and to come to an immediate settlement?" At the mention of accounts, the spirit which had sustained the old gentleman began to give way to his habitual horror of such investigations. He fidgetted uneasily for a moment or two, then recollecting himself, he rose, stepped to the bell, and rung it steadily.

"This is a somewhat sudden call, sir," said he, addressing Macaskill; "you know I have no great head at arranging such matters; but, as this is an affair in which the interests of my family are so

deeply concerned, I must take leave to call in the assistance of certain friends, who are not inclined to desert me in my hour of need." The writer started.

"Friends, Airdruthmore! and what friends can have any knowledge of our private transactions? Who can have any title to interfere in matters of accounting between a client and his agent? You don't doubt my honour, I hope?"

"O no, certainly, not at all," responded the laird—then turning towards the servant who entered, "my compliments to Glenvallich and Mr. Tresham, and I beg them to step this way—certainly not, sir, but as you speak of these accounts being of so formidable a character, and as I am but a poor accountant, you can't wonder that I should like just to have a more competent opinion than my own regarding them."

"Glenvallich and Mr. Tresham?" said the lawyer, echoing back the laird's words; "and by what right are they to interfere, I again ask?"

"By that of my own choice and will, sir. I apprehend every man has the right of choosing his own friends?"

"O, doubtless, sir: it's all very well for you," replied the writer, whose mortification had become by that time too great for concealment, "but as I was not prepared for such a measure, I must object to being any party to it."

At this moment Glenvallich and his friend

entered the room. "My good friends," said the laird, "Mr. Macaskill there has taken the liberty of not only accusing me of practising certain deceptions towards himself, but of informing me, that unless I agree to pledge myself to certain conditions, which he may name, if he likes, but with which I do not feel myself justified in complying, he will insist on an immediate settlement of accounts—a settlement which, as he has forewarned me, will be of a very serious nature—involving even the possible loss of home and estate. Now, I, being no man of business, request of you to be present during the examination of these accounts, and to assist me in this important settlement. Your kind promises have induced me to hope that you will do me this act of friendship, and I trust to your fulfilment of them."

During this harangue of the laird's, his former friend had remained glaring first at one and then at another of the party, with a dogged air, which partook of confusion and malevolence. The unnatural paleness of his countenance betrayed the uneasiness which this unexpected interference excited in his breast, while the knitted brow, and closely compressed lips, betokened the rage which he felt at those who had dared to come between him and his victim.

"Gentlemen," said he at last, "this is an honor for which I was by no means prepared, and one which, you will excuse me if I say, I never should

have thought of soliciting. The laird of Airdruthmore, without privity or consent on my part, has thought fit to state his own view of the case which exists between us; as I have no intention of submitting myself to the tribunal he seems to have chosen, I shall decline following his example. He has set me at defiance; I accept the challenge; but the courts where I shall choose to meet him may not perhaps be those he would have preferred, nor those that would be most favourable to him. With partial judges and juries I shall have nothing to do. Good morning to you."

"Stay, Mr. Macaskill," said Glenvallich, "stop for a moment, if you please, and listen to me. My friend Airdruthmore has requested Mr. Tresham and myself to assist him in what he considers a difficult situation: for such a proceeding I am sure no fair-thinking man can blame him. We, on the other hand, have accepted the office with no other object, assuredly, than the hope of promoting an amicable and satisfactory arrangement between the parties interested. If you reject these pacific overtures,—as no doubt it is quite in your power to do,—you can gain little beyond the odium which cannot but attach to those who prefer litigation to amicable adjustment; while, by a contrary proceeding, you must gain in opinion, without losing one point which is already in your favour. I leave it to yourself,

then, to judge how such a rejection will be viewed in the eyes of men."

The interval of reflection which these observations afforded to Macaskill, had more effect upon his decision than the arguments of Glenvallich, although he could not but perceive their justice. He clearly saw that no really good object was to be attained by a sullen rejection of the proffered negotiation; whereas, on the other hand, by producing his accounts, and stating the nature and amount of his claims, without further demur, he should gain the double advantage of establishing his title to moderation and fair dealing, and by a display of the hopelessness of their case, appal his antagonists, and terrify them perhaps into his own terms.

Smoothing his countenance, therefore, and assuming one of his most insinuating smiles—a physiognomical metamorphosis too common with him to be difficult, even when his wrath was at the fiercest, he said, "I trust that Glenvallich, as an honourable gentleman himself, will give me credit for every disposition to candour and moderation, particularly in this case, where a gentleman I have so long known as a friend is in question. Sorry am I to think, that a friendship of such long standing should meet with any interruption. He best can tell the cause I have to be dissatisfied, and if that were but removed, he knows that no one could be readier than I should be to renew these

aimcable relations. Well—it cannot be—no need to shake the head—I have had my answer ; and now, as under these circumstances of lessened confidence, and altered views, it is incompatible with the feelings of either to continue the connexion which has hitherto subsisted between us, a settlement of accounts becomes necessary. You have been required, gentlemen, to examine these accounts, and to assist in this settlement, and though I by no means feel called upon, as of right, to submit them to your inspection, to prove the uprightness of my dealings and intentions, I am ready to do so, and to satisfy you, even now, in as far as I can be at present prepared, regarding their nature and amount.”

So saying, Mr. Macaskill, thrusting his hand into the depths of a mighty pocket, produced from its capacious womb a packet of formidable size, tied in that correctly technical form, with red tape, exactly of that breadth and colour which is calculated to convey such uncomfortable sensations to the souls of those unlucky debtors who may have been brought within the reach of a determined creditor.

“ In the first place, gentlemen,” said the W. S. slowly unloosing and unfolding this portentous packet, “ here is an account current, purporting to be between John Stewart, Esq., of Airdruthmore, and Thomas Macaskill, W. S., &c., which deducing the balance from that which was duly

rendered last year along with all subsidiary and contingent accounts, exhibits a summary of the transactions of the past twelvemonth, terminating on the 31st December, 18—; and including the various accounts of business and general agency herewith rendered, together with balance of periodical interest, bears a balance in favour of said Thomas Macaskill of £11,563 7s. 4½d.”

The slow monotonous tone in which the W. S. enunciated this statement, corresponded with the measured, deliberate, determined action with which he gradually unfolded, opened, and spread out, with the twitch of a practised hand, the stiff sheets of large foolscap, correctly ruled, beautifully written, and neatly stitched together, which contained the long account, and at length placed his fore-finger upon the important and serious line which exhibited the sum total of balance at debit. Large as the sum was, both Glenvallich and Tresham, as well as the laird, experienced an infinite relief at finding it was no more. But their joy was premature.

“ You will observe, gentlemen, that in this account alone there appears an increase of nearly three thousand pounds sterling, including the advances made for repairs of that unlucky flood.”

“ This then is the amount of your claims against Airdruthmore?” said Glenvallich, inquiringly, and pointing with his finger to the balance.

“By no means, Glenvallich,” replied Macaskill, in a cold, business-like tone, for he now was in his element, and revelled to the full in the fiendish delight of the unpleasant surprise which he knew awaited his hearers. You will observe, sir, that there are here noted a considerable list of undertakings and dependencies, all of which, although in my hands in some way or other, have not been brought into the body of this account. There is a pretty large mortgage, you will see, on the estate; and then there is a list of bonds, and bills, and acceptances, granted by Airdruthmore, or by me on his account, which amount to the gross sum of £12,000 more—making a sum total, affecting the estate or personals of this gentleman, of £23,563 7s. 4½d.

Having in the same calm deliberate tone made this weighty exposition, the man of law slowly raised his head, and looking through his half-closed lids, cast a keen inquisitive glance over the several members of the party. His malice was gratified, for dismay did assuredly sit enthroned in the faces of them all. Tresham turned pale, Glenvallich’s gravity deepened into an aspect of serious distress, but the old laird, thunderstruck at the appalling climax which had terminated the agent’s recapitulation, started up, exclaiming, “How, sir? twenty-three thousand pounds!—bills, bonds, mortgages! By G—d, it’s impossible, sir!”

“ You will find it to be correct, Airdruthmore,” replied Macaskill, in the same cold, mild, constrained tone; “ and you may remember what I have said and offered when it’s too late.”

“ Never, sir, never !—but how !—where ?—when did all this come about, and I not know of it ?”

“ Because you would never attend to such matters, Airdruthmore, and that was not for want of expostulation on my part, I ’m sure.”

“ No, no, that ’s true, sure enough,” exclaimed the conscience-stricken laird; “ and my fault and my loss it has been : but this I never could have dreamt of—after the wadsett too.”

“ That was long ago, Mr. Stewart; the wadsett barely cleared off existing incumbrances.”

“ I have heard something of that wadsett,” said Glenvallich, “ pray indulge my curiosity—what does it consist of ?—of Glenvoyle, if I recollect right, does it not ?”

“ Aye, of Glenvoyle, and Leurich, and the farm of Baldenny,” said the laird, with a sigh.

“ What ? all that in the wadsett ?” inquired Glenvallich; “ and what was the sum paid upon these lands, pray, Mr. Macaskill ?”

“ Why, really, gentlemen, my memory cannot be expected to serve me for all these particulars. I ’m not just prepared.”

“ But mine does,” said the laird; “ it was my first transaction of the kind, and well do I re-

member it—it was just at the time I was married,” and another sigh accompanied the words ; “ the sum was six thousand pounds.”

“ Six thousand pounds ! why the farm of Baldenny rents for two hundred and fifty pounds alone, and Leurich must be a good deal more—then Glenvoyle itself ;—why, the wadsetter must have a fortune of his bargain. But why has not the wadsett been redeemed since the rise in the value of land rents ?”

“ Ask Airdruthmore, sir ; when had he ever six thousand pounds to dispose of, and he getting still deeper and deeper into debt every year ?”

“ But who holds the wadsett ? and when is it redeemable ?”

“ Really, sir, I cannot reply to such questions now. I have memoranda, no doubt, on these matters ; but I don’t carry them about me, nor do I hold myself bound to speak thus at random upon every transaction I may have had a share in, connected with the Airdruthmore property, for the last thirty years.”

“ I beg pardon, Mr. Macaskill, I did not mean to give you any trouble—it’s no matter whatever—mere curiosity—pray let us proceed. As Airdruthmore appears not perfectly acquainted with the growth and history of all these bills, and bonds, and specialties of which you here make mention, sir, you will of course be good enough to furnish a list of them for examination.”

“No doubt, sir, that can be done, although my correspondence with Airdruthmore, had he preserved it, would have afforded all that is necessary. These bills and bonds, sir, must be provided for, and that speedily.”

“And the vouchers for this account, sir; of course they also are ready?”

“They shall be so, sir, whenever called for in a regular way.”

“Well, you are aware, Mr. Macaskill, that Airdruthmore has unfortunately been but little in the habit of preserving accounts of any kind; it may be needful to get copies of your accounts for several years back, in order to satisfy his friends, his *son*, for instance, regarding the very large amount which appears against him—your clerks could easily make out a series of these, surely?”

“My clerks, Glenvallich, have something else to do. I am willing to give any explanation, and to take any reasonable trouble; but really, under all circumstances, I do not see why or how I should be so much at Airdruthmore’s service, as you seem to expect. And now, pray tell me, gentlemen, what have I to look for? A settlement, and a speedy one I must have, in some shape or other—that is indispensable.”

“Well, Mr. Macaskill, now you come to the point; will you please to state to us what you propose?”

“Why, gentlemen, I will be plain with you. You have heard but one side of the story, it is true; but I shall not trouble you with a long repetition of it, revised and corrected according to my own way. You have seen my account; it can be vouched, and must be paid. But let Airdruthmore agree to my terms; let him consent to the marriage of my nephew with his daughter; her fortune to go to her husband, and a reasonable pendicle, which I will point out, of the Airdruthmore estate to accompany it; and I will engage so to manage matters that the wadsett, Glenvallich was inquiring after, shall be recovered and settled upon my nephew. This, with the Ballytully property, and the aforesaid pendicle, will make up a better estate, perhaps, than even Airdruthmore’s daughter is entitled to look for; and as a further consideration for his compliance, I will cancel so much of my debt upon the property as will reduce it to ten thousand pounds. This will leave a property worth one thousand to eleven hundred pounds a-year, in the hands of Airdruthmore, burthened with payment of only five hundred pounds a-year; and let any man show how he will ever make half as good of it by any other arrangement. If these terms are rejected, I have only to say that I shall instantly take measures to compel a settlement of accounts; the consequences, gentlemen, I leave to yourselves.”

“And this is your ultimatum, sir?” said Glenvallich.

“It is, sir,” responded the man of law.

“Well, sir, you are too fair a man to refuse us some time for considering so important a step: we shall give you our reply in eight days.”

“Eight days! Look you, sir; I wish to be reasonable, but as I happen to be pressed for cash myself, I must take *immediate* measures; you must reply in *two* days.”

“In *eight* days, Mr. Macaskill, and not an hour sooner. Be reasonable, as you say; besides, we must have time for examining the accounts.”

“O, as to examination, if you accede to my terms; and, *conscientiously* speaking, it is your only safe course—there will be no need of such a form.”

“Well, well; that may very likely be the course adopted. But we must have the time I mention.”

“Well, to show you how much disposed I am to conciliation, I agree to the time. In eight days from this I shall be in Edinburgh, and shall expect your reply in course of post. And now, Airdruthmore, I would willingly shake hands and be friends. Your friend Glenvallich seems inclined to give you sensible advice; for all sakes take it. I have business at Ballytully; and as I should not like in any way to interfere with your deliberations, I will take my leave. I

hope we may all meet again shortly in peace and harmony." With these words the W. S. leaving his formidable bundle of accounts, indued his overalls and great coat, called for his gig, made his most gracious grin and bow, and to the no small relief of the laird and the rest of the party, quitted Airdruthmore.

"And *what thee devil*," said Tresham, to his friend, as Macaskill left the room, accenting every syllable as he slowly uttered it; "*What thee devil*, Charles, was the meaning of that concession; so I must call it, of yours to this old scoundrel of a writer? Of course, I conclude that all this fictitious appearance of entertaining his impudent proposals, means nothing but to throw dust in his eyes. D—n his insolence for daring to make them! but to what purpose man? to war, it is plain, we must go, sooner or later, and why not at once?"

"Content you, Hal, I have my reasons, which I shall explain, time and place convenient; be assured that no interest of yours shall be sacrificed by any suggestion of mine."

"Well, my dear friends," said Airdruthmore, who since the time of his last out-break, had remained in a painful state of mingled stupefaction and indignation, which utterly bereft him of the powers of speech, "I am wholly resigned to your wills; do whatever you think best; I'll give my consent, for my poor head is fairly bewildered.

I see nothing whatever but ruin staring me in the face, and woe's me for my poor boy ! As for Isabelle, thank God, she will be safe so far ! but what better can be looked for when that false loon's in the plot against me ? But ye're both better judges of these matters than I am ; I leave it all to you. I'll do any thing but wrong my poor bairns ; they have not deserved it at my hands : and as for Belle, I would as soon see her cold at my feet, as in the power of such sordid, unprincipled miscreants. No ; Tresham has won her heart, and well deserves her hand ; and her own fortune he shall have, clear and untouched : thank God, that's safe, at all events, whatever comes to me."

" Fear nothing, my dear sir," said Glenvallich, smiling, " I spy some daylight already through the gloom, black though it look just now. But we'll not trouble you more than can be helped. Tresham and I will work together, and ye need not fear from us so heavy a bill of costs as that of our worthy friend who has just left us."

" Well, my dear Glenvallich, I should be grateful to Providence for throwing such friends in my way at such a time ; and I am grateful, I trust ; so I leave all in your hands, and yours, my dear Harry, God bless you both !" And the old gentleman, scarce able to repress his sobs, wrung the hands of the two young men, and hastily quitted the room.

" Good, honest, kind-hearted, old man ! thou

hast been shamefully and sadly abused!" exclaimed Glenvallich, looking after him, as he left them. "And a base, cold-blooded scoundrel he must be, that could take advantage of thy confiding simplicity; what an argument for the retributive justice of another world do facts like these afford, were arguments needed! But come, Tresham, I saw you were a little at fault about my tactics, though you have already had some cause to confide in them."

"Why, I have assuredly; and I do confide: but you will pardon curiosity, and vouchsafe some explanation. I assure you I had just enough to do to keep my hands off the old sinner as he went on; my fingers itched to be at that proboscis of his: and your coolness rather puzzled me, I confess; instruct me, therefore, unless secrecy even towards me, be a part of your scheme."

"By no means, Hal—therefore listen. In the partial show of accounts we have already had, as well as in the strong anxiety for an *early* settlement, and with as little examination as possible, which Macaskill could not disguise, I can see enough to convince me that all is not just as it should be, and that a close investigation may elicit facts which will materially alter the complexion of affairs. Such an investigation, therefore, I am sure he would avoid if he could; but for such, if threatened, he would undoubtedly prepare himself, for he is as acute at scenting a snare as the oldest

fox of the profession. Now, I wished him to suppose us intimidated : inclined rather to negotiate than to fight. By this we gain time to examine the mass of papers we have got here, and from which I expect to extract several useful hints. I am much mistaken, if malversation, and that to no inconsiderable amount, may not be made out against uncle Tom. But I had a still more cogent reason for securing a delay, even of so short a period as eight days, at this moment. The facts connected with that wadsett, the particulars of which I never heard till to-day, are so suspicious, and may be so important, that I consider them worthy of instant and most rigorous inquiry ; and had we declared open war, I have not a doubt that the means of information would have been shut against us, or the complexion of the transaction so changed, as to baffle effectually the plan I have conceived. What would you think, if out of this very matter, we were to secure to the honest laird a handsome income, even let the worst come to the worst ?”

“ Why, that would be a master-stroke, certainly ; that would be turning the enemy’s guns against himself, with a witness ; but explain.”

“ Why, you don’t perhaps know what the term wadsett means. It is a Scotch law-term, signifying a species of mortgage, by which the lender of a certain sum of money receives as security, *possession* of a piece of land, the rents of which he

enjoys in lieu of regular interest, and which he is in fact, *pro tempore* proprietor, until the debt be paid up. This must be done too within a certain specified period, otherwise the right of the original possessor of the land lapses altogether, and the lender of the money becomes *bonâ fide* proprietor, as if he had purchased it in a regular manner.

“ Now, I have little doubt that this wadsett, which took place not quite thirty years ago, that is, at the time of the laird’s marriage, may still be open to redemption; either that must be the case, or it is actually in possession of uncle Tom himself; for you remember he proposed contriving that it should be made over to his nephew on his marriage; and in this latter case, I have no doubt the transaction might be opened up by a court of equity. The value of the lands, I have the best means of knowing is full five times that of the sum borrowed. They rent now for not less than twelve or fourteen hundred pounds a-year, and of course, if recovered, would form a very pretty small property, even if incumbered still with a debt of six thousand pounds. Now, I mean this very day to send off an express to overtake the mail, and so gain a day upon the regular post, with instructions to my own man of business, Oswald, requesting him to ascertain, without one moment’s delay, how this business actually stands. If the deed be recorded regularly, he is to tender the money to the lender immediately; if not registered, he is in

the same manner to use every exertion to discover the lender, formally to proffer payment, and thus annul the wadsett. Obstacles will no doubt be set up against this measure, for the thing is too good to be parted with quietly; but if the time be not lapsed, Oswald will be too much for them, and thus there will at once be a brand plucked out of the fire for the good old man; a handsome maintenance for his old age, and a decent reversion for his son, William Stewart, who I hear is a very gallant, meritorious, and rising officer."

"On my word, Charles, this outgoes my best hopes. I did look for help and good counsel from that long head of yours, but scarcely for such sudden and solid fruits. Wadsett! I shall love the crabbed, old-fashioned term as long as I live! why you are a perfect Machiavel, man!"

"I hope an honest politician, Hal; I trust the plan may succeed, but don't say a word to the old man yet; it would be cruel to raise hopes which, after all, may not be realized. I think we had better not speak too sanguinely, even to Isabelle. Ah! I see—I know what you would say; *her* prudence, *her* moderation;—well, your own prudence, I fancy, must guide you there—a lover's prudence! frail reed, I fear. But I *have* confidence in Miss Stewart's good sense, Harry; and, in spite of love, in the discretion of both of you. But we must be diligent, my dear fellow. I'll write Oswald a state of the case so far, and tell him to be

down here without fail before the eighth day. He'll probably send some matter-of-fact, mechanical accountant to arrange and classify what may be too much for us, but in the meantime we must work hard and examine every paper."

We shall not insist upon the gratitude expressed by Isabelle, and the still deeper emotions she experienced towards both her kind friends, for their zeal and disinterested exertions. The conduct which Tresham observed towards her, was that which every man of proper feelings should hold towards the woman of his choice, when she is sensible, judicious, and worthy of his confidence. He related to her the substance of what had passed at the momentous interview we have described; he did not conceal the serious aspect of her father's embarrassments, but he comforted her with the glimpses of hope, which his better informed, and more experienced friend, had discovered through the lowering prospect. And Isabelle was comforted—comforted not more by the cheering prospects, which were thus held forth like the olive branch of old to the longing hearts of the patriarch and his family, than by the delightful feeling of security, which the possession of such friends—the hope of such a future partner of her fate, should Heaven but smile upon the promised union, could not fail to bestow. Yet still it was with fear and trembling, that she admitted the flattering anticipations of happiness; and ever and anon, in spite of the

soothing caresses and cheerful remonstrances of her lover, the cloud would again come over her, and visions of danger, and doubt, and misfortune, would harass her mind.

“ Ah, Mr. Tresham ! are not these but gay day-dreams after all ? are they not but the unsubstantial visions, with which young and sanguine minds cheer themselves in the morning of life ? Should we thus divert ourselves with building airy castles, when we have stern realities to deal with ? Ah, many a mental misgiving have I ;” and her trembling lip and unsteady voice, gave a painful force to her words.

“ Isabelle ! dearest Isabelle !” replied her lover, straining her to his bosom, “ give up such painful thoughts ; keep your eyes, love, on the bright side of the picture ; at worst we shall have competence, and love. Aye, in spite of all commonplace sneers against love in a *cottage*, believe me, love and *competence* are no bad things ; and then have we not hopes ? well-grounded hopes, and friends ; true, warm, sincere friends, to aid our own exertions ? and we are young, Isabelle, and have all the world and its chapter of chances before us ! so away with despondency, dearest, and think but of better times and brighter days to come.”

“ Ah, Mr. Tresham !” said Isabelle, smiling through her tears, “ you are a good comforter, and I will try to be more reasonable ; but, O !

there is a weight at my heart, which I cannot throw off, and which even all our threatened misfortunes are insufficient to account for. I am weak and foolish, I know—but I will try to be firm, and to do my part, whatever may be required of me !”

CHAPTER VIII.

A CONSULTATION AND A CONTRAST.

SILENTLY, but steadily, did the task of the two friends proceed; and a dull and a dusty one did it prove at first; but after a while, as success began to crown their search, as paper after paper of consequence was ferreted out from the dire confusion; as heap after heap, being shook, brushed, examined, docketed, and tied up afresh, assumed the appearance of arrangement and of order, not only did hope, but satisfaction and increasing interest, spring up to cheer their toil, and whisper of a happy result.

In the course of four days they had got pretty well through the contents of the large chest and the box; they were classified and arranged, and a mass of accounts was extricated which obviously contained much of the information they sought. The contents of the old escritoire were less volu-

minous, and in a better state of arrangement, although they referred to a more remote date; indicating that the habits of the laird, or those in his confidence, had formerly been less irregular. To the surprise of Glenvallich, they discovered here a series of accounts for several years, furnished by the agent who had preceded Macaskill, together with those of that gentleman consecutively down to the date of Airdruthmore's marriage, tied in separate bundles, the latter being accompanied by sundry account sales of timber, bark, &c. and copies of invoices of various cargoes, referred to in the main accounts. Even the cursory glances which Glenvallich could bestow on these documents during the process of arrangement, was sufficient to arouse suspicions as to their fairness, so extravagant did the charges appear, so comparatively trifling the proceeds. Every hour did the investigation assume a more important and laborious shape: but so far were the voluntary labourers from being either alarmed or discouraged, that their energy was increased, as their hopes were awakened by the prospect before them.

Such was the state of affairs, when on the evening of the sixth day after the departure of Macaskill, Mr. Oswald, Glenvallich's friend and man of business, made his appearance at Airdruthmore, attended by a young man, his assistant. The appearance of Mr. Oswald was as different from that of his professional brother as their characters were

essentially dissimilar. He was a middle-sized, middle-aged, well-made man, with an open benevolent countenance, but an expansion of forehead, and a keenness of eye, which afforded a strong pledge of the intelligence within. There was indeed somewhat distinguished in his appearance, which betokened more than the mere man of business:—the steady friend, the intelligent companion, the acute judicious counsellor, the man of firm integrity, were written in every speaking line of his sagacious, though scarcely handsome countenance; and Tresham, when he saw Mr. Oswald, internally acknowledged that this was indeed a man in whom he could at once repose unlimited confidence.

Almost immediately after the first compliments had passed, Mr. Oswald requested an audience with Glenvallich. At this conference Tresham, as of course, was present, and was gratified by learning that at least one of their efforts for the distressed family was likely to prove successful.

Mr. Oswald had made search for the registry of the wadsett in vain—that formality had not been observed regarding it; but through other channels he had obtained a clue to the ostensible holder, and to him he had made formal tender of the money on the part of Airdruthmore, with due notice that he should be required to give up possession of the land at the next ensuing term. As a measure of precaution, the same notice had been served upon

Mr. Macaskill at his domicile in Edinburgh, with all due formality ; so that the technicalities of the law had been perfectly fulfilled. “ I have reason to be satisfied,” continued he, “ that the period of redemption exceeds thirty years, although I cannot say by how much. I wish we could get a sight of the deed, it would set us at rest on that point ; but its non-registration hitherto, and our tender of the money before the observance of that necessary form, would of itself defeat any hopes the enemy may entertain of keeping possession.”

“ I am delighted to hear this report, my dear sir,” said Glenvallich ; “ and now, if you please, we shall make you acquainted with what we have done here in the way of preparation.” He then, proceeding to the scene of their labours, showed Mr. Oswald the mass of papers, which they had been engaged in reducing to order, and had inventoried according to their dates and contents. He was astonished at their progress, and bestowed unbounded commendations on their perseverance and industry. In the course of a couple of hours, his keen and practised eye had glanced over the separate parcels, and detected their probable value. “ I see, there is much useful stuff here ; why, we shall be able to make out a consecutive statement of the agent’s intermissions from first to last, or nearly so, from these alone ; but there are some years missing, I see—must be searched for—must be had—good check upon the enemy’s future state-

ments. So---so---so—account sales; aye, but no vouchers—nothing vouched, I see—business accounts—rentals—aye, aye—all formal enough. Well, but now, gentlemen, let us understand a little. What are your own ideas? What plan have you thought of?”

“That,” said Glenvallich, “must depend upon you, Mr. Oswald. Macaskill has denounced war against us, unless upon certain inadmissible conditions; so war is all we have to look to. All we have done is to gain a little time for consultation and resolving on what is best to be done first.”

“Well, Macaskill, I understand, demands a settlement of accounts; you can’t object to that; and if you do go to war, that is, to *law*, he can force it.”

“Yes, but you must understand that we suspect his threats are rather made with a view to intimidation than with any real desire of resorting to a judicial appeal. Mr. Stewart of Airdruthmore is a man who knows nothing of business: for thirty years he has trusted implicitly to this person as his agent: he has never lived extravagantly, has had a fair rental, which ought to have increased greatly with the rise in the value of Highland property; has sold a fair forest and much valuable hard wood; and, with all this, according to the agent’s showing, his estate is drowned in debt, bills, bonds, mortgages, and balance of account to himself. Now this, you will admit, is a state of things which at least calls for inquiry.”

“ Ah ! certainly, a very awkward state indeed, my dear sir ; yet not without precedent, as I have cause to know ; but undoubtedly inquiry is proper.”

“ Well, it was to facilitate this that Mr. Tresham and I have undertaken the assortment of this alarming mass of papers ; and, as I think, when you shall have examined them, you will say, not without some success. I think they exhibit strong grounds for suspecting malversation and collision, and when that awkward transaction of the wadsett is considered, I think you will be disposed, like me, to question the integrity of Mr. Macaskill as agent to Airdruthmore.”

“ We shall see—we shall see ; but I assure you, Mr. Thomas Macaskill is not the man at all to be caught napping, if report does him justice, for my own dealings with him have been few. Among the profession he is held cautious—astute—unlikely to leave opening for attack from friend or foe.”

“ Of that I am aware, Mr. Oswald, but we sometimes see the cunning man overreach himself, and fall into the snare he has set for others ; and as he has found Airdruthmore easy game for these thirty years, it is not impossible that he may, on some occasion or other, have been less upon his guard than usual, and left traces which our industry may discover. At all events, I am satisfied that no court will give *more* than Mr. Macaskill demands ; for moderation and he are strangers, in

spite of his asseverations of candour and fair dealing ; so that in the worst view of the case, we hold that there is more for than against us. But we have yet another *corps de reserve* to bring up against him, of which hitherto no one has received the smallest hint. It so happens that we hold in our hands proofs—the most damning proofs, that Mr. Roderick Macaskill, the favoured nephew of this same Thomas Macaskill, has been, and doubtless still continues, deeply engaged in the illicit traffic which is carried on in these parts, and is, in fact, one of a very daring gang of smugglers.”

Glenvallich then described in greater detail the manner in which these proofs had been obtained, and produced them for Mr. Oswald’s inspection. “ These, you will see,” added he, “ are tolerably conclusive ; and although there is no absolute evidence in them that the uncle is concerned with the nephew, I think the presumption is, that he must be acquainted with his transactions. It was the desire of establishing this link that put me on my guard in our dealings with Mr. Macaskill ; for I felt, that should he get wind of these papers being in existence, he would in some way or other detach himself from his nephew, with a magnanimous display of virtuous indignation, and thus render them of no avail against himself ; whereas, if discreetly brought forward, I think they may give us the means of dealing with him on better terms.”

“Upon my word, Glenvallich,” said Mr. Oswald, “it’s a thousand pities you were not bred a lawyer ; an excellent agent or advocate was spoilt by your chancing to be born a laird. Your conduct, sir, in this, as in the affair of the wadsett, has been most judicious. With all my experience, I could not have given you better advice, and I hope your friends will fare the better for you ; at all events, my best offices in the matter shall not be wanting. And now it will be proper to prepare for giving your reply to this absolute person. You have still two days to come and go upon, and I must make the most of them. Pray, Glenvallich, let these papers,” pointing to a number of parcels he had selected, “be carried to my room ; and use your influence for having a pot of coffee placed at my disposal there to night. I hope, by the morning, we may be able to give you some comfort, and I shall then set the clerk a-going.”

On the morning of the eighth day, Mr. Oswald invited the gentlemen to another conference. “I am happy to tell you, Glenvallich, and you, Mr. Tresham,” said he, “that I think we have here a body of documents which must materially alter the complexion of Airdruthmore’s affairs. It is obvious to me, that a vast quantity of property and produce has been received by Mr. Macaskill, or, his agents, from the Airdruthmore estate, of which a very imperfect account has been rendered ; or, at least, of which very inadequate returns appear.

There are evidences, I think, of great overcharge in labour, manufacture, and management of these concerns; and strong proofs of general malversation. It appears to me, too, that there are other mis-statements, which will considerably influence the balance on the general account; and I am even at a loss to discover the corresponding credits for some of the heavy bills that have been granted and retired. Now all these matters require a far more minute investigation than I can give them here. We must have accurate comparisons made between the real prices of the day, and those credited in account for produce sold. The rent-roll must be examined, leases looked narrowly into, vouchers mustered and compared, and a thousand things done, which will take both time and trouble. I will leave Mr. Adams here, behind me, among these papers—he is a first-rate accountant, and will draw out a report of intermissions with any scribe in Auld Reekie. When that is done, we must collect every paper in readiness for transmission to me. In the mean time, there is one point I would fain have some further light on. I have collected a good deal about this same wadsett from the scattered correspondence of the time; but I am convinced there must be, somewhere or other, a draft of the deed itself. I should like to get hold of that; pray, where did you find all this old stuff?”

Glenvallich described the loft and the escritoire.

“Broken to pieces, say you? Could I see it? perhaps I know something more of those old-fashioned receptacles than you do.”

“By all means; you could see it at any moment; when would you like to go?”

“Now—immediately—for to-morrow I must be off, and there may be much to do before then.”

Accordingly, another journey to the loft was undertaken, and Mr. Oswald had no sooner seen and examined the mutilated old walnut-tree ruin, than, as if he had been at the making of it, he lifted up a sort of sliding desk, sounded with his knuckles, tried a rusty knob or two with the end of the handle of his pen-knife, and soon succeeded in causing a flat board, which, to all appearance, formed part of the solid wood, to start up a little from the rest. A shallow cavity was thus discovered, in which lay several packets of papers, and might have lain unseen and unsuspected till the day of judgment.

“There are few of these old-fashioned affairs,” said he, “without their *secret*,—a secret not very difficult to discover for one who has been at the examination of so many as it has been my fate to be,—and in this case, I doubt not, worth knowing.”

So saying, the party marched back to the house with their prize.

“I told you so, Glenvallich, here it is—here’s the very note we wanted—the very draft spoken of—and in Macaskill’s own hand, too, as I’m a sinner! but let us see if there’s any name inserted;

no, no ; here are the blanks—and date blank too—and period of redemption!—here, aye here it is ; thirty years, by Jove ! if it has been extended in the same terms we are close enough run, sure enough. But we're all right, though he perhaps won't allow it ; that neglect of registration is fatal to him ;—neglect, did I say ? I'll be bound it was caution ; just as you said, Glenvallich, over-caution has ruined him here. He has kept it as a rod *in terrorem*—aye, over his nephew as well as his client. The projected connexion he had so much at heart has been the cause of this : if the nephew came into his terms, the wadsett was to have been registered in his name ; if not, why, his own might at any time be inserted, and nothing to hinder it. It is clear he never expected opposition from the laird, who had never in thirty years run counter to him. I see, too, here are some of the missing accounts ;—yes, yes, we shall do well enough now. And now you must give in your reply to Macaskill's ultimatum ; there's no more to be gained by temporizing ; so perhaps, Glenvallich, as you were the person who made the terms with the gentleman, you may as well send him the reply and the defiance at once. You have done me the honour to name me agent in the case,—just refer him to me for whatever is connected with a settlement of the Airdruthmore accounts, as that gentleman's legal adviser."

Glenvallich accordingly wrote as follows :

“Airdruthmore, January 18—.

“Sir—In terms of the promise which I made you on —— last, on the part of my friend, Mr. Stewart of Airdruthmore, I beg to inform you that that gentleman declines the alternative at that time proposed by you, and has expressed his desire that a settlement of accounts should take place between you, as soon as the necessary examinations and adjustments can be made. On this subject, and on all others connected with your late agency on the Airdruthmore estate, he requests you will communicate with John Oswald, Esq., W. S., of —— street, Edinburgh, who is fully empowered by him to treat regarding them.

“ I have the honour to be, Sir,

“ your obedient servant,

“ C. J. MACALPINE.

“To Thomas Macaskill, Esq.
W. S., Edinburgh.”

This letter was accompanied by a few lines which the laird was instructed to write, containing a formal intimation to Mr. Macaskill that he was no longer to consider himself as agent for the Airdruthmore estate, and discharging him from acting thenceforth in that capacity, and both letters were instantly forwarded by post.

“ And now, Glenvallich,” said Mr. Oswald, as he was preparing for his departure, “ I must request you to trust me with the contents of that

smuggler's pocket-book. I suspect I may discover a clue that will bring things home to uncle Thomas yet. There's a fellow I sometimes employ, a devilish bad subject, I believe; but in dirty jobs we must not be nice about our tools. I think something may be made out through him. I need not promise you discretion; if there's any thing to be got at, the man I mean is the fellow to do it; he would ferret out Old Nick himself if he were to take the field in the shape of a thief or a smuggler. So now farewell; you shall hear from me if I have any thing worth telling; and don't fail to keep me advised if any thing occurs in this quarter."

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNSELS OF THE WICKED—PLOTS AND
SCHEMES.

— What is't ye do?
A deed without a name!

AND how was the worthy Thomas Macaskill employed whilst such serious preparatives were in progress, against his interests and character? He had quitted Airdruthmore under the influence of no very enviable sensations; for though he felt perfectly satisfied with the degree of firmness he had shown, and the impression he conceived himself to have made upon his auditors, particularly during the latter part of the conference, it was not without alarm that he saw the old laird take the bit so completely in his teeth, and shake himself free of an influence he had so long acknowledged; still less did he relish the step taken by the old gentleman, of calling in such a coadjutor as Glenvallich. Macaskill knew that gentleman to possess a character for good sense and sound judgment,

which he could not, without a very jealous alarm, see brought to bear against himself: and though there was nothing in Glenvallich's demeanor calculated to increase this apprehension, it was a coalition which he would gladly have seen dissolved. As for Tresham, he viewed him only as a hot-brained silly boy, almost beneath his notice, whom he could at any time baffle and put to silence, if he should find it inexpedient to crush him.

“My malison upon the saucy puppy!” muttered he to himself;—“I had just enough ado to keep decent terms with him in the old fellow’s presence. *He* blow up all my well concerted schemes!—*He* carry off the prize from Rory! Saul and body—never! or my name’s no’ Tom Macaskill! But I’m thinking I staggered them. How the old boy stared and stormed when he heard the sum total of the statement! I think Glenvallich himself was a wee dumb-founded, not but that these were queer questions he put, too—but what could *he* know about the matter? And for that wadsett—whew! that’s safe at all events, for where would the ould man conjure up six thousand pounds from, and no’ a plack in his pouch, to keep the de’il out o’ it?—But, by the Lord, we must be sudden though—wont do to shilly-shally longer. The bills must be provided for; and that foolish boy, Rory, what’s come over him I can’t tell; I’m feared that last confounded Glen Shlichard job

has been worse than he likes to own. By my faith, I'm just seek of that trade; and if—but no—nonsense—that can't be, my name can never be brought up; as for Rory, he must look to himself. Well, I wish to heaven the thing was fairly settled and done: surely they must come into terms, they never would think of risking the old man's utter ruin—surely?" And yet the secret uneasiness which he could not suppress, contradicted the assurance which his words in vain expressed. "And what is the alternative to be?" continued he. "I must frighten the old man, but as for an action, a process—better not, if we can do without; yet all *must* be safe—pooh! the old fellow never kept an account, had not one to show, that was plain from what they all dropt—may render what I please; who is to dispute it?—vouchers enough. And yet if we could do without, a compromise would be safer; but we must get their answer—we must watch the old fellow and his two young bullies."

And watch them he did by proxy; but so wary were the friends in their proceedings, that the spy who was left to report, could gather nothing more than that the laird and the ladies went on as usual, and Glenvallich and the young Englishman were busy all day in their rooms. All this was natural enough; so after a couple of days' stay at Ballytully, Mr. Macaskill made a secret expedition towards the skirts of the late scene of

action, against the smugglers. There he found most of the people unwilling to commit themselves in any shape, and that little information was to be elicited from them. None of those whom perhaps he hoped to meet, were to be heard of; it was plain that a desperate blow had been dealt, but the extent of the mischief he could not exactly ascertain; so, sullen and dissatisfied, on the fifth day, he bent his way towards Edinburgh, where new alarms and disappointments awaited him.

It was on the morning succeeding his arrival in that city, that his nephew, freshly arrived, as it seemed from travel, came suddenly to his house. He found his relative seated at his solitary roll and butter, which seemed to suffer total neglect, the eyes of the W. S. being fixed with much earnestness, but no apparent satisfaction, upon a heap of papers before him. "How now, Rory? where the de'il are ye come from, and where have ye been all this time, and be d—d to ye?" was the civil and affectionate address of the uncle to the nephew, as the latter entered the breakfast-room.

"Why, what's the matter, uncle? you seem rather out of sorts?" was the nephew's reply.

"Out of sorts!" quoth the uncle; "and reason good there is, I think. Here am I, sweating night and day to make a man of you, sir, and there are ye always undoing my work; what deevil's cantrip have ye been after now, when ye should have

been waiting my orders, and keeping at hand to help me when I was down sorting that auld fule yonder?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, it was not my fault. I was forced away to the west coast, and Argyleshire, by some ugly news."

"Rory, Rory, that cursed fancy of yours will be your ruin, man, and God knows I wish it was na quite so close to myself. Ye have made a fool of me, sir, wi' your fair words and fause acts."

"Sir, I don't understand you—I don't deserve such harsh words from you, and I beg you wont use them," replied the young man, sulkily. "You liked the trade well enough when the profits ran high, and now they've fallen, and less certain, ye abuse it."

"And what should hinder me to abuse it, I wonder, sir? what should a sensible man do, pray, but tak' to his heels an' be off from a falling house, ere it smothers him?—Why don't ye do the same as I'm trying to do?—better to cut and run wi' the loss of a skirt, than lose coat and all."

"Faith, sir, that may do for you; but others that have been further ben, don't find it so easy; it's no' in a moment that one can shake themselves free of such a concern as ye ken ours to be."

"Ken ye what the ould tod did, when he was ta'en by the leg, Rory?—he cut it off wi' his own teeth, and left trap and it behind thegither; and if ye had ta'en my advice long ago, ye would have got

off wi' scaut the loss of a finger—it's weel now if the hale limb 'ill save the body. But tell me a little more about this same Straemash in Glen Shlichard? I'll be bound it's a worse affair than ye like to tell o'."

"Why, it's bad enough, sir, I believe—but——"

"Saul and body, man, dinna but me—dinna haver stuff, but tell me the truth, out and out."

"Why, sir, there's a lot of stuff lost, and goods too, buried in the ruins of the huts that were burned; and horses and geer. But the worst is, that the lads are frightened—they don't like to trust themselves in the glen again. That d—d Glenvallich has made it too hot for them—and that confounded young English puppy that I told you of—curse him! he nearly got his broth from Black Kenneth—and he may get it hot yet. But Kenneth was forced to make himself scarce—the country was alarmed—and there was a bit of a row in Argyleshire. The cutter had a narrow escape, it seems; she was chased by a sloop of war on the Irish station, all the way from Raughlin, and forced into one of the west-coast lochs, where they tried to run a few goods; but some fellow peached—and the stuff was seized, and the cutter had another sharp scurry, and only escaped in the dark. Kenneth made a bold push to recover the goods; but he failed, and a lad or two were nabbed; so now he's in hiding—skulking about till the hue and cry is over."

“ Aye, my malison on Kenneth, and the whole lot of these west country wuddie fu’s. It’s their bare-faced impudence and wild villainy that have blown up the trade, and you with it, I suppose, sir.—Where’s the money ye was to have brought me this week, man, to take up your bills?”

“ Faith, sir, I’m afraid it’s with the Highlan’ man’s breeks—none have I at present, certainly. This has been a *floorer* to me for a while to come. But one good chance has come to sweeten the evil a little—you know the bills I gave these Dutch snobs—them that I was forced to give Kenneth to pay for the cutter’s last cargo, and clear her out with; they’re burnt in one of the bothys in Glen Shlichard, with a lot of the black rascal’s papers. He came to me wi’ a long face, and made a d—mnable row about it, wanting me to renew; but I wasn’t quite young enough for that. Let him settle with the Dutchmen as he likes, for his clumsiness; I’m well out of the scrape.”

“ Well, Rory, it’s an ill wind that blows no good: it’s well ye’ve luck that way, for I’m feared there’s little for ye in others.—Here’s all my fighting and fleeching in your favour with Airdruthmore, like to come to nought. Confound the old blockhead! to play the ass all his days, and turn out fox at last! I’ll be hanged if we don’t land in some scrape with them before the game’s played out. I thought I had just brought all things to a fair pass, and that he and his

friends would rather come to terms than quarrel; but what think ye was waiting me here to welcome me home last night?—here's a regular intimation served on me in form, proffering payment to the holder of the Glenvoyle wadsett, of the full sum borrowed, and this morning, that fellow Mac Farlane, who was to stand in my shoes as the lender, sends to tell me he has had a *double* of the same served on him---and both by---whom do you think?—why by that d---d dry, pig-headed chap, Oswald, Glenvallich's agent!—Saul and body, but I smell it a' out now; and dull enough was my nose that didna scent what they were after when I was down yonder, but de'il cares;—if they think to cast me, by the Lord they'll be sore mistaken; they may get a kittle fling themselves yet, 'ore they're done wi' me. It's no' me that's going to give up the wadsett this gait; I may show them a trick o' the game they little ken of.—Give up 1,500*l* pounds a year, kirk and king paid?—Na, de'il be in me first---they'll no' find Tom Macaskill so green a horn as to cast any way they seek to thraw him. But ye see plainly we're defied, and it's Oswald that's to fight their battle. Weel, I have ding'd as good as him 'ore now, and I may do the same again; we must prepare for the fulzie, for I'm thinking it'll be a tough one. For you, Rory, I recommend it to ye to get your own matters square. Get out of the hands of these Highland scoundrels, as

fast as ye may, or, mind my words, they're fast going down hill, and they'll lug you wi' them, and ye needna grip to me to haud ye back, for de'il be in me if I'm going to lose character and respectability, even for you, man---mind ye that."

"Cursed fool that Rory now, after all I have told him:---but what's bred in the bone, they say---it's the blood of the old Highland catheran that's in the lad. It's a wonder I have na more of it myself; but a good education does wonders. Well, he that will to Cupar, maun to Cupar---so if Rory will take his own way, he has only himself to blame for it, if it leads him to ruin. I must look after my own affairs." And with these reflections, the worthy W. S. rising from the breakfast-table, took up his papers, letters, and spectacles, and retreated into his *sanctum*.

"Aye, aye, uncle mine," muttered the laird his nephew, as he left the room; "and so ye would cast me off like a dead weight to drift down the stream, and save yourself when ye see me drowning. Well, I know ye're not the man to ride the ford with when the water's deep; but ye may find that I'll stick on, in spite of your good or evil will, and that if ye get a haud of the bank, ye must e'en help me out, or quit the grip yourself. I'm no' to lose the bite and thole the buffet---and ye're no' to pouch the gain and shirk the risk. I may cheat ye there yet, ye're tackit faster

to my tails than ye think for. But, by my faith, your advice is no' that bad, and I wish we could all clear ourselves of yon work. These Highland ruffians are no' just the cattle to sort with, after all. They're good servants but bad masters; and that black scoundrel Kenneth, evil befall him! has too much the whip-hand of me just now—and Paterson too—d—n the fellow, I don't half like him in that affair—he's too far ben with us—but hang them, they've their own necks to mind, and I think we may consider ourselves safe yet. I wish they got their mouths full of salt water some fine morning though. Well, withdraw I must, that is if I can—but these are heavy losses! who can tell how matters may wind up with us after all's done."

Three days after this dialogue, the uncle and nephew met again. The brow of the former was dark and corrugated with care. His cheeks were sallow, his rubicund nose had lost its lustre, and his whole aspect had assumed a dark and haggard lividness, which betrayed the painful disturbance within. "Well, lad—here it is at last—piping hot. Here's the declaration of war—short and sweet. I'm formally discharged as agent to the Airdruthmore property, by the old man; and here's a note from that formal sneaking fellow Glenvallich, referring me for all that regards the settlement of factorage and other accounts, to Mr. John Oswald!—Saul and body!—they shall

have a settlement with a devil to them ! I wish we could have kept it out of court, though—a fashious business it will be, and that same John Oswald is as obstinate and pains-taking and pertinacious as a sky terrier after a founart:—he may find himself in the Tod’s-hole yet, tho’ But what have ye to say for yourself, sir ? What have ye been doing ?”

“Faith, sir, I have little to say, and that same not much to the purpose. They’re still sulky in the glens: they’re saying it was black Kenneth and his lads that brought all the mischief on them. They’ve begun a little work already on their own account; but they swear they’ll have nothing more to do with others. And black Kenneth’s off—can’t be heard of, and Paterson’s hiding too, with all the accounts, so that there’s no collecting—no money to be had. Wood and wool, the old story, we might have; but that’s not money; that will not pay my bills; and even if it would do, where’s the vessel to take it off? By Jove, I’ll be in hiding myself, if this goes on.”

“Aye, *your* bills, Rory; and what are they to mine? There’s the British Linen Company has civilly signified that they won’t take more of my paper, till my discounts are reduced; and there’s Mackechney and Co. of Leith, they hold to the tune of £2,000, which they don’t choose to put their names to; and the Glasgow house are pressing for the deficiency on the kelp; and expenses on

land run high; and—curse me, but I'll have to stop myself, if something does not turn up. This Airdruthmore business would have patched up matters finely. We could have touched the ten thousand, and that would have kept us going till other things came round, and I could have settled it with you in that wadsett business; but now all the fat's in the fire. Confounded hard to be so bothered in my old age, and all for you, Rory—all for you ! ”

“ How for me, sir ? My own vexations and undertakings are enough for me, don't saddle me with what don't concern me. Was that kelp affair for me ? or the wood in Glen Fintra ? or were these same bills in Mackechney's hands on my account ?—or —— ”

“ All with a view to your prospective benefit, Rory ; for who have I on earth to work for but you. Wind up how I may, there will aye be enough for this old carcass ; but don't let us quarrel about it, we have rather more need to try and get out of the scrape.”

“ Well, Rory, I spy day-light through this matter,” said Mr. Thomas Macaskill, to his nephew, some few days after the last-mentioned interview ; “ I have applied, as instructed, to Oswald, and have been served with a requisition, to send in a full and complete account of my intrusions, from first to last, with vouchers and all. This confirms my suspicions that the old man has

never an account to produce. I know his careless habits; they are all gone for waste paper long ago—he almost said as much, indeed. Now, this leaves me at liberty to revise my own accounts, and prepare such a statement as I defy the devil himself to pick a hole in. But we must be cautious—*very* cautious. I wish we could but get rid of these two chaps that have stuck themselves up at Airdruthmore's elbow, we might soon bring up our leeway with the old man, if his ear was left unguarded, for he's as soft as butter, and as weak as water; flatter him, blow in his lug about old friendship, unwillingness to meddle with old and respectable families, readiness to a fair arrangement, and above all, respect for his daughter, and he'll sit with half shut een, like a big trout to be kitted, till the noose is ow'r his head. We might do something in that way. He might commit himself for a moment,—and let me alone for nailing him. But while these two fellows stand sentry on each side, the devil a bit can we get near him."

"Well, sir, but what is to be done? If I had black Kenneth here, or even that knave Paterson, we might play them a plisky that would take them out of the way for awhile."

"No, no, Rory—no, no, that would never do—that's a job might make things worse instead of mending them; we must have no force. What, man! the days of Macshemie and Mac Callummore are past now: we can't dirk a man, or shoot him

from behind a tree, and no more about it, as used to be the way in those times—and a laird of ten thousand a year too!—Poh, stuff man. No; I think I can manage to get the Englishman sent off; but Glenvallich's a cool sharp-sighted chield, that it may be harder to deal with; but may be—we most see about it."

"If Tresham were once out of our gait, sir, and Glenvallich away for ten days," said the nephew, "I am sure something to the purpose might be done—if I could but get a quiet word of the girl."

"Aye, man, are you so bold, Rory?—ye had time enough, and speech enough, with her for the last two years, and what have ye done?"

"Aye, sir; but we learn wisdom by experience. If I had Isabelle Stewart by her lone, for one hour;—but I must think well about it: there's a hope yet—a good hope; but there's no use in talking of it till we can speak to some purpose."

"Well, Rory, see that it be so: no more of your nonsensical speculations, man, that only end in smoke and sair een."

We shall here leave this worthy pair for awhile to their own virtuous cogitations, and turn our attention to a more pleasing subject of contemplation—the party at Airdruthmore.

CHAPTER X.

A SUDDEN JOURNEY—ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES.

“ Wilt thou be gone ! ”

THE well-directed industry of the laird's two zealous aides-de-camp had operated so effectually during the period of their application to business, that, after the events we have related, little remained for them to do. The accountant continued his labours, and occasional letters were exchanged between him and Mr. Oswald, or between the latter and Glenvallich, communicating a very satisfactory chain of facts confirmatory of their suspicions concerning Macaskill. Glenvallich was of necessity obliged to return home; but the frequent repetition and increasing length of his visits at Airdruthmore, had exceedingly promoted the growth of a sentiment, which quietly and unsuspectingly had stolen into the breast of the calm and prudent laird, for the lively sister of his friend.

It is an observation common almost to triteness, that men are apt to select companions for life, of characters very opposite to their own ; and it is quite as well, we think, when such is the case ; for we are persuaded that, generally speaking, such discrepancies tend rather to enhance than to diminish the pleasures of wedded life. Were two grave reflective persons, for instance, to come together, what miserable monotonous winters' evenings would they pass, unenlivened by the spirit of repartee or even of conversation—each sitting wrapped in their own sage thoughts, like two solemn owls in their own ivy bushes. On the other hand, what could be expected from a union of two lively and volatile people, but a constant succession of mental and physical gambols, each striving to out-do the other in their fantastic capriccios : it would be a short life and a merry one, with a witness ! Then two wits would be always snapping and snarling, two geniuses jostling each other in their aërial flights—and as for those of pure unruffled tempers, dear souls ! they would soon sicken of their own sweets, and die of a moral surfeit before the year was out. It is far better as we see it happen. The grave enlivens his dull metal with an amalgam of gaiety ; the wit lowers his keenness and takes off his fiery edge, by cutting his jokes on a block of good-natured stupidity ; the sweet tempers his lusciousness by a due admixture of acid ; the brisk courts the dull ; the wise the

foolish; and the mild, the sensible, sedate, judicious laird of Glenvallich, overlooking, or rather uninfluenced by the attractions of the accomplished, high-minded, and beautiful, but calm and retiring Isabelle Stewart, fixed his affections on, or was captivated by, the lively, spirited, piquante, almost thoughtless, but certainly very lovely, Maria Tresham.

Nor did it appear, that the young lady was at all insensible to the elegant and refined attentions of the young Highland chief. We shall neither take upon us to affirm nor to deny, whether the three eagles' feathers which graced his bonnet, when he wore one, the supporters that adorned his carriage, or the ten thousand pounds a year that figured in his rent-roll, were or were not entirely devoid of influence in the favour of their possessor; but we are very certain that with all her apparent volatility, Maria had too much good sense and heart, to listen to, far less to encourage, the addresses of any man whom she could not conscientiously esteem, independent of rank or fortune, or whom she was not prepared honestly and frankly to accept.

The arrangement of Airdruthmore's affairs afforded to Glenvallich a plausible pretext for ever and anon returning to the hospitable abode of that gentleman, and day after day flew swiftly and pleasantly over the party as they spent their time in the rational enjoyment of the present, and in well

grounded hopes for the future. The now acknowledged footing upon which Tresham was known to be in the family of the laird, rendered all explanation or excuse for his continued residence there unnecessary, even to the limited portion of the world which took either interest in, or cognizance of, the private affairs of the laird or his household.

A fortnight had thus elapsed without an incident of consequence to mark the progress of time. The mornings were usually spent in walks and drives, when the weather was good—in reading and similar in-door occupations, when bad. On such occasions, the hour of arrival for newspapers and letters was always matter of interest, if not of anxiety, as affording fresh matter for conversation and remark, to cheer a rainy afternoon or a gloomy evening. One day, on the arrival of the post-bag, a letter was handed to Tresham, the direction of which was in a hand with which he was not acquainted. Upon opening it, he found the contents to be as follow :—

SIR,

“ Reluctant as I am to resort to a mode of communication so deservedly liable to suspicion, I am unwillingly reduced to the necessity of employing it; and although circumstances preclude the possibility of my putting my name to this letter, I entreat you not to slight its contents, for they are the warnings of a sincere friend. Your conduct of late,

in absenting yourself so long from your regiment, at a time when it is employed in actual service, has excited so much dissatisfaction, and has so deeply affected your character as an officer and gentleman, in the opinion of your brother officers, that, unless you remove the impression by quitting the inglorious repose in which you have so long indulged, and joining your brothers in arms, you may find yourself in a situation alike unpleasant and discreditable. You are therefore advised, by one who wishes you well, to proceed at once to London, and report yourself at the Horse Guards as ready to join. If you have any curiosity to discover the well-wisher who thus advises you, you may hear of him on the fifteenth day from that on which you will receive this, by being in Piccadilly at the second lamp-post east from St. James's-street, between nine and ten in the evening.

“ Your sincere friend, J. Q.”

“ To Capt. H. Tresham.”

The uneasiness which the contents of this singular epistle excited in the mind of Tresham was too obvious for concealment. For some time past, indeed, his own conscience had whispered reproaches for the unconscionable length to which he had contrived to have his leave prolonged in time of war. But although he winced occasionally under the effect of such considerations, he had as yet formed no decided plan for removing

the cause of self-reproach. The truth was, that while matters remained in a state of uncertainty between himself and Isabelle Stewart, he could not bring himself to take any decisive steps in the affair; and when all doubt was removed by their mutual explanations, and the subsequent events at Airdruthmore, he felt it impossible to tear himself from the object of his affections, and from the scenes where he had enjoyed so much tranquil happiness; and accordingly he contrived, through the interest he enjoyed in certain quarters, to procure continual extensions of leave. Thus, though little disposed to pay attention to any anonymous communication, the tone and subject of the letter in question happened to coincide so remarkably with the self-reproaches which had for some time disturbed his own mind, that, spite of himself, it affected him, and to that degree that it attracted the observation of the whole party.

To the inquiries which poured in upon him, and the hopes that he had received no unpleasant news, he replied only with a faint smile, and as faint and evasive a negative; and by such answers he contrived to ward off an explanation for the day. But the subsequent morning brought a fresh communication, and from a quarter which he deemed so authentic, as, combined with the letter of the preceding day, at once to decide his resolution. It was a letter from his agents in London, informing him that a majority in his own regiment, for the pur-

chase of which his money had long been lodged, was then vacant by the promotion of his superior officer ; but that his own presence would probably be required in order to complete the transaction, and that at all events it would be requisite for him to join immediately.

“ So !—this decides the business,” thought he ; “ and now I have but to follow orders. Here ends my dream of happiness and pleasure for the present, and I must make the best I may for the future ;—hard, though.”

“ Why, Harry !—what, Harry, man !—what the devil’s come over you ?” said Airdruthmore, as he saw the young man cutting and jerking at the uneaten viands on his plate with a perturbed and totally abstracted air, after he had read and pocketed his letter. “ What are ye at there, man ?—what ails you, hey ?—No ill news to day again ? Come, tell us what ye’ve got ?”

There were other eyes, which had watched the young soldier’s disturbance with an anxiety not the less painful that it was silent. The effect of the letter received on the previous day had not escaped the observation of Isabelle ; but she saw that it was a subject on which he cared not to be questioned, and she therefore abstained from all remark. But when to this was added the discomposure produced by that of the succeeding morning ; when she watched the sudden change of expression and the gloomy abstraction which over-

clouded the customary animation of his countenance, her alarm became excessive, and the depressing presentiments under which she had for some time laboured, recurred, in spite of her better judgment, with a force which she could not resist. With a beating heart did she watch the words and the expression of her lover, as making an effort to smile which had but miserable success, he articulated with difficulty, “N-o, sir—nothing—nothing serious—only—only I—I’m afraid I must leave you for a while.”

“Leave us!—and why? In the name of goodness, where are you going, man?”

“Business, sir; I fear I must go to London on business.”

“London, Harry!” exclaimed the laird, with an expression of amazement almost akin to horror, “London!—the man’s mad!—London at this time of year?—Why—how—when?”

“Why, God bless me, Harry, what is the matter, brother?—nothing of my mother, I hope. Don’t keep me in suspense, my dear Hal—pray, pray, pray, what is it?”

“O no, Maria; there’s no ill news in my letters—at least to none but myself; the cause of my uneasiness is altogether selfish. In short, I must go to London on business connected with my professional promotion, and which can neither be avoided nor delayed. I have had too long a holiday, I believe,” added he with another faint smile, “and

some of my brother officers are said to be jealous of it, at least, so says one of my correspondents—an anonymous one, it is true ; but to-day a letter from my agents summons me up upon the purchase of my majority, and I must obey the call, or lose it and my honour to boot.”

“ Nay, never do that, Hal—there’s not a friend you have would suggest such an idea—but it is rather an unlucky moment ;” and her eye glanced compassionately at Isabelle, who, silent and pale, could scarcely by her utmost efforts restrain her tears.

“ But God bless me, Harry !” resumed the old gentleman, whose mind, habitually disposed to reject unwelcome impressions, could seldom at once apprehend the necessity of an unpleasant measure. “ Where’s the need of leaving us in such a hurry ? Surely you might have your leave renewed ?—Is there no way of avoiding ?—and then, Lord help me, what are we to do without ye, man—how am I ever to manage this business with Macaskill without my right-hand man ?”

“ O sir, no fear of you ; I leave you in excellent hands—flattered as I may by your trust in me, I can’t admit any cause of alarm. Glenvallich will stand by you—a far better aide-de-camp than I.”

“ Na, de’il a bit of that will I grant. Glenvallich is a good staunch friend, I admit, and much do I owe him—but he’s no Harry Tresham.”

“ Upon my word, sir,” said Maria, reddening a

little, but in a tone of playful reproach, "I think you do Glenvallich less than justice—with all due deference to Master Hal there, I do think his friend has played the first *role* in the late grand drama. What, by Hal's own confession, would you have done without Glenvallich's good business head? And who was it that provided you with this stout legal champion that is to unhorse the false caitiff Macaskill?—this tight little David, that is to overthrow the great ugly Goliath of Auld Reekie?"

"Well done, Maria, I like those who stand up for absent friends—Glenvallich shall hear of this," said Tresham, with something of his usual animation; but it deserted him as he resumed—"No, sir, you are in good hands, not a fear of you or any one else here; and for me, I trust my absence may be short. Depend on it, if it lies in my power to shorten it honourably, I shall not be long of re-joining you all here, for however short a time; for you know there's little certainty in a soldier's life: but come," added he with a sigh, "we need not talk of disagreeables at present. I am not off to-day at all events—let's enjoy the happy moment, whatever becomes of the future;"—yet the sigh and the tone of his exhortation were sorely at variance with the exhortation.

"To-day;—God bless me!" exclaimed the laird; "ye're no even minting at it so soon, surely?—No, no; give us a week longer at least, that ye

must do, to reconcile us to your going at all." Tresham shook his head without reply, and rising from table in silence, the party broke up.

Who is there amongst us, arrived at the very indefinite, but sober period of life, termed the years of discretion, who has not experienced that most agonizing of all our youthful trials, the parting for the first time from the object of our early love? And who that has known it, can ever forget the keen, searching, sickening thrill which accompanies the first certainty of the impending blow—the aching restless void which fills the heart and paralyzes the faculties, when the last faltering word has been spoken, the last look given, and we feel in our inmost soul that our misery is full and complete? With the delicacy of female kindness, Maria Tresham refrained from intruding on her distressed friend, a sympathy which at that moment could neither have been effectual nor welcome. She retired to her own apartment; and, possibly with a similar consideration, the good laird, taking his hat and staff, sallied out upon his own pursuits, leaving the house quiet to the undisturbed possession of the lovers.

"Will you walk to-day, Isabelle?" said Tresham, as they met alone; and his voice trembled with emotion as he added, "it will be the last of our walks, for a while at least, I fear." *The last!* what agony is in that little word! Isabelle could not speak; she reached out her hand to Tresham,

and as she turned aside her head, he could see the tears flow in rapid succession down her cheeks. He was not master of himself—in an instant she was clasped in his arms. For some moments neither could utter a word, and the sobs of Isabelle were audible. At length she made an effort to extricate herself from his embrace.

“Do not, do not,” she said, in low and broken accents; “O this is very wrong—do not thus add to the misery—let me go, I entreat you—I will join you immediately; the air will do me good.” Tresham could not trust his voice, but straining her convulsively to his breast until her cheek rested on his, he held her thus for some moments, and then gently released her; she rushed from the room, and he was left alone.

In a quarter of an hour, Isabelle returned, clad in her walking dress. Her face was pale, but composed. Without a word, she gave her arm to Tresham, and they walked on together for some time in silence—each fearing to trust their voice or to break the painful spell which seemed to bind them. How often do we find that the gentle and constitutionally weak and timid female, proves in the hour of trial more firm and decided than her stronger, more arrogant helpmate, displaying an endurance of mental and corporeal pain, a presence of mind, and a courage that puts to shame the lords of the creation! It was Isabelle who first broke the silence. “I fear, Mr. Tresham,”

said she, "that you have not told the whole of your morning's intelligence. This is an unexpected call—may I, dare I ask you, is your absence likely to be so very temporary as you hinted at?"

"Temporary, it certainly will be, dear Isabelle," replied Tresham, in low tones; "but I fear our meeting again may but lead to another separation—and—and it will be very hard to bear it—for me at least;" his voice failed a little;—"at such a time too! and yet what can a soldier look for?"

"You expect then to be ordered abroad! O I felt that this might be—*must* be!" said Isabelle trembling. "Ah! said I not truly, Mr. Tresham, that your ties here must interfere with your duty and progress in life, or be broken?"

"Do not say so, Isabelle! do not embitter the misery of this hour—I trust things may be better ordered."

"Ah, how can that be? You must join your regiment—on foreign, dangerous service too!" and she shuddered as she said the words. "Even were I your wife, Tresham, I could not tell you 'stay'—and I——"

"Nay, Isabelle, dearest, do not despond so. For your sake as well as my own, I must secure this step; but having done so, I shall have paid my debt to duty and to honour, and shall be free. Your father's prospects, I am rejoiced to say, are brightening every day; every post almost, tells us

of fresh discoveries and better hopes—then with my little fortune and yours united, what a happy family should we make at Airdruthmore! for I should retire on my half-pay, and I assure you, should look no further for happiness than our own circle. I am delighted to see my friend Glenvallich is assuredly taken with Maria; such a union would add infinitely to our comfort. She is a good girl and deserves the good luck she would have in securing such a protector as Glenvallich. Believe me, dearest, the prospect is brightening on all sides—don't suffer idle forebodings to make it gloomy."

"Ah, Tresham, who can help forebodings?" said Isabelle, with a faint smile; "you once called me superstitious, you know."

"If I did, Isabelle, give me cause now to retract the imputation; your good sense must surely show you, that there is no real ground for apprehension; that all I have stated is reasonable, at least."

"No; no real grounds, perhaps, except in your absence, and that you will not quarrel with me for thinking a real evil," added she smiling, "but how long do you expect to be away?"

"Not one day longer than absolute necessity requires. I shall reach London in five days at furthest; my present leave is not yet out for a month—I shall easily get it renewed for a short while, on plea of arranging my private affairs—perhaps some lucky hit may turn up in the mean

time, and I hope a fortnight may see me here again."

"Well, I shall hope for the best—but God forbid that you should know the sinking of the heart which I now feel, and shall experience until you return." A tender caress was Tresham's only reply, and they continued as they walked to converse regarding the future, until Tresham at length contrived in great measure to re-assure his fair companion, and to reason both her and himself into a more cheerful frame of mind.

While thus engaged, they wandered on until they reached the path to Elsie's cottage, and the recollections excited by that well-remembered spot, where they had so lately met under the most agitating circumstances, were now contrasted with the more delightful sensations of mutual confidence, and the hopes of future and lasting happiness. "I must bid my old friend farewell," said Tresham, as they took the way to the cottage; "it would be as ungrateful as unfeeling were I to omit such an attention."

Ever since the scene with the ruffians at her cottage, the health of Elsie had been obviously on the decline; her strength had failed, and even her mental powers were sensibly weakened. Her conversation had become still more wild and disjointed, and sometimes she wandered so much that those who heard her suspected the entire decay of her intellect. Occasionally, however,

she would revive a little, her apprehension would lighten up, and evince some portion of that acuteness which used so remarkably to characterize it in her better days.

The greatest gratification she could receive, was from the visits of her "dear child," and Isabelle, with that kindness of heart which was one of her most striking attributes, would often repair to the cottage even when the lowering weather might have restrained a more robust frame from exposing itself to the blast. Yet it was impossible to persuade the old woman to leave her dwelling, even to be near her favourite mistress. "Na, na," she would say, "where the ould tree has grown sae many years, it most e'en decay; where the speerit and the body have dwelt so long thegither, there most they pairt, an' there most the corpse be streckit!"

They found the old woman seated as usual at her fire, and though her greetings were kind and affectionate as ever, they failed not to remark with pain an occasional expression that indicated the wandering of her mind, although her observations bore also many touches of her ancient acuteness.

"It's life to me to hear your lightsome fut, my darling," said she, "but I dinna think it has the same blythe spring in't that it used to hae. An' weel does it please me to ken that ye're aside her, young man; for ye're her doomed marrow, and lawful helpmate; and didna Elsie tell ye so lang

syne? But dinna ye be leaving her, young man. Dinna ye quit the grip 'ore she's yere wedded wife by kirk an' law, or mind my words, ye'll rue the day ye did it."

"O, hush, dear moome," said Miss Stewart, distressed both by the plainness of her speech, and at the recurrence of her mysterious denunciations; "don't annoy Mr. Tresham; he is sufficiently grieved already that he must leave us for a little: don't vex him more, dear moome."

"An' he *is* going then!—he's going to leave ye, darling!" the old woman suddenly rather shrieked than said. "An' will ye let him go? O, in the name of God, young man, give up your purpose, an' your journey, if ye love the dear bairn that's aside ye."

"My good Elsie, duty requires that I should be absent for a few days: it is not in my power to avoid it; a soldier must obey orders. But there is nothing to dread—nothing can hurt Miss Stewart. Glenvallich will be here, and my sister; and what is there then to dread?"

"Duty, said ye? an' what's your first duty? But ochone! it's ow'r true, he says—it's ow'r true. A sodger—aye, a sodger most obey; an' most na we sinfu' creturs obey the Lord's will? O Lord, forgive me my sinful word. What's doomed most be—an' why div' I seek to alter it; most na thon taishe be true too? didna my own ould een see it? sinner and fool that I am, then, will I never

believe? most my wisdom be aye for setting up against *his*! Ochone! ochone! pity me—pray for me!” She paused in deep and helpless agitation; but again the weakened mind returned to the prevailing feeling, and her emotion increased as she again burst forth, “O dinna leave her, Mr. Tresham—they’ll have her away, an’ ye may never see her more! O the villain—black, black villain! O mercy, mercy!” Her last words were lost in painful screams, which accompanied a convulsive spasm that threatened to terminate speech and existence together; and as it slowly passed away, the poor old visionary sunk upon her chair in a state of utter insensibility.

“This is frightful!” said Tresham; “can we get no assistance? this is worse than I ever saw it before.”

“My poor dear moome!” said Isabelle, “these fits must speedily destroy her; but for the present the danger is past.” They laid her on her bed, and Isabelle remained performing every duty, and putting in practice every expedient to recover her, with a tenderness which moved the admiration of her lover. When animation returned, Isabelle beckoned him away. “Let us leave her to the girl now,” said she, “our presence would not fail to discompose her when she revives more completely—perfect repose and stillness are now her best restoratives.”

“A bad way this, to restore your flagging spi-

rits, my dear Isabelle," said Tresham, as they left the cottage together, "I am sorry you have been exposed to this scene; it is bad for both of us at such a moment—and to leave you now—by heavens, Isabelle, it is madness—but what can I do?"

"Nay, now it is my turn to chide you, Mr. Tresham; remember we are in the hands of Him, without whom not a sparrow can fall—and shall we then fear? no, let us behave like rational beings—like Christians: let us leave our fates in the hands of Him whose mercy is as inexhaustible as his providence is all-seeing!"

"You are right, my dear Isabelle; it is not for us to shrink from the duties or the trials He sees fit to assign us; but neither let us neglect secondary means. I know that my friend Glenvallich will feel it a gratification on his own account, as well as on mine, to remain here during my absence; and while you are under his care I can have no reasonable dread, unless on the score of health; and for the preservation of that, we must trust to the Almighty alone. But still, dearest Isabelle, you must be cautious; if it were but for risk of health alone, do not expose yourself by evening and lonely walks to this solitary place—to Elsie's cottage; prudence requires this attention to safety and to health, and I trust you will not be induced to deviate from so obvious a measure of precaution."

On the succeeding day, in reply to an express sent by Tresham to his friend Glenvallich, that gentleman himself made his appearance. With a generous eagerness to soothe the troubled mind of his friend, he came under a voluntary pledge to remain at Airdruthmore, as much as should be in his power, during the young soldier's absence, and to watch over the interests of the family, with the same care that he had devoted to the late important investigation. That virtue is its own reward, is sometimes an equivocal apothegm; but although we may be very far from entertaining a doubt of the disinterestedness of Glenvallich's devotion, it may be fairly questioned whether his recompence was strictly limited to the satisfaction of doing good; for, judging by evidence both circumstantial and presumptive, we have reason to do more than suspect, that it was in the course and discharge of this duty, and during this very period, that he found means to come to a very satisfactory state of intelligence with the sister of his friend.

On the morning succeeding Glenvallich's appearance at Airdruthmore, Tresham departed for London. The reader need not fear an assault upon his or her feelings, by any attempt on our part to describe the parting scene, nor to dwell upon the miseries of this painful separation. By means of horses, laid at different distances, to a point where the public conveyance passed, Tresham gained many hours in advance of the regular course of

conveyance, and reached London on the morning of the sixth day, or five full days from the time he quitted Airdruthmore.

As soon as he had shaved, dressed, and breakfasted, carrying with him the two letters which had been the cause of his journey, he hastened from the inn where the mail had deposited him, to the office of his agents. While traversing the narrow passage which led to the chamber of the gentleman with whom his chief acquaintance lay, the door opened, to give exit to a tall emaciated young man, who wore his arm in a sling. As Tresham drew up to let him pass, the careless glance with which he had eyed the stranger was changed into a more fixed and earnest gaze; and as the young man in passing looked up to acknowledge the courtesy, the recognition became complete.

“ Good heavens, Fotheringham ! is it you ? ”

“ Tresham ! God bless me ! you here ! I’m delighted ! ” were the mutual exclamations. “ Nay I can only give you this,” added he, laughing, as he held out the left hand—“ the good folks on the other side of the water have left me no other choice at present.”

“ Aha !—hit ?—not badly I hope ? ”

“ Why, rather sharply too ; but I was rode over, and got a bad contusion—it was that sent me home, and not in the best case, as you may see.”

“ And when did you arrive ? ”

“Just come—not three days in town.”

“Aye? by Jove that’s lucky—then you can tell—you’re just the man I want. Do pray come in here;” and they accordingly retired into a parlour appropriated as a waiting-room.

“Pray where did you leave the head-quarters of the regiment?” Tresham began.

“At —, not three weeks ago,” replied the other.

“Well, now, Fotheringham, I want you to tell me one thing, frankly and honestly: have you ever of late heard my name mentioned among my brother officers with the regiment?”

“Your name, Tresham? yes, often, surely.”

“And in what terms, pray? tell me sincerely, I entreat.”

“Why, what *are* you at, Tresham? in what terms? why, how should they speak of an honest, warm-hearted fellow like you, but as such?”

“But I mean—that is—how did they speak of my long absence from the regiment?”

“Why, I suppose now you want to hear all the fine things they said of you, but I can’t remember them, man; you were much missed, I can tell you, though; they regretted your absence as a pleasant fellow, and Barkley declared often that there hadn’t been a good *devil* seen at the mess since you left; they all want you back again.”

“What! did you hear no grumblings at my prolonged absence? no reflections, eh?”

“I dare say they thought you a devilish lucky fellow to get so long a run, but I can’t say I remember any thing particular about it. But what are you fishing for, Tresham? is there any thing wrong?”

“Why, my good fellow, I will own you have relieved me considerably. You have a right to hear my reasons for being so inquisitive. Pray look at this letter, which I received in Scotland only a week ago;” and Tresham fixed a searching look upon the countenance of his brother officer, as he read the anonymous epistle which he handed him.

The indignant lighting of the young man’s eye was a sufficient and satisfactory reply.

“What an infamous rigmarole of trash!” said he at last; “where the deuce could this have come from?”

“That,” said Tresham, “I have yet to learn; but you now understand the motive of my cross-questionings; and when I tell you that I *have* had some prickings of conscience about my self-indulgence, you will also comprehend why I was more moved by this vile piece of slander than I should have been. But I was wrong; I did our good fellows an injustice;—God bless them! they did not deserve such a want of confidence from me.”

“Poh! poh! nonsense; every man takes as long a leave as he can get, and there are plenty of officers yet with the regiment.”

“Aye; but there are changes, I hear; Dalby has left us, I find.”

“Left us? how?”

“Why, got his promotion, it seems; he’s lucky to get it so soon.”

“Why, how do you mean? I have heard nothing of this.”

“What! not heard that Dalby has got the lieutenant-colonelcy of the ——, vice Parker, dead?”

“No, certainly; and I’m sure there was not a word of this yesterday at the Horse-guards, and I think I should have heard of it myself had there been any thing in it.”

“Good God! who can have been juggling with me thus?—but no—there can be no mistake; here’s the very letter that brought me to town. I was just going in to see Maxwell, and answer it in person, when I met you. Let us go and ascertain the truth at once.”

Accordingly, Fotheringham, accompanied by Tresham, returned to Mr. Maxwell’s room. The surprise which that gentleman expressed at seeing Tresham sufficiently proclaimed how unexpected was his appearance there: and when Tresham, in reply to his queries, drew forth the letter which he had received, as he believed, from the very individual before him, Mr. Maxwell’s astonishment was ten-fold increased.

“This is a most extraordinary circumstance in-

deed, Mr. Tresham," said he; "this letter does indeed bear the signature of our firm, but it is none of our's. However, I must inquire into the matter."

He rung the bell, and spoke a few words to the clerk who obeyed the summons. In a little while the young man returned, and communicated to his employer the result of his mission.

"It is as I said, Mr. Tresham; no such letter has been written by us, and the signature of that you have received is a forgery. Its contents are wholly without foundation. Major Dalby was, by last accounts, with his regiment, and Colonel Parker in excellent health. I hope this has not been the cause of your journey to town?"

"Indeed it has, sir, and at a moment, too, when I could well have dispensed with taking it; and, to say the truth, the circumstance makes me a little uneasy, for it can be no foolish hoax; it is assuredly the act of some designing person, and for some sinister end, I fear."

"I am exceedingly concerned for it, I assure you Mr. Tresham, and will be most read to lend our aid in tracing it to its source. If you will leave me the letter, I will endeavour to make something out of it. Pray, can I be of any further use to you, gentlemen?—then good morning to you."

"By heavens, Fotheringham, this is a most strange affair!" said Tresham; "I must try and sift it out. But my business in town is at an end;

and I have some affairs in Scotland which must be attended to, so I am off at once. But let us dine to-day together at the Colonnade; I shall be quite in time for the coach. I'll whisk down to Mitchley and see my mother—must do that—and then off by the mail for Scotland.”

The friends did accordingly dine together, and Tresham, in the evening, throwing himself into the coach which passed the gate of Mitchley, early on the following morning found himself at home. It had occurred to him that the time was come when, in decency and in duty, it was incumbent on him to make his mother acquainted with his intentions of introducing another member into the family, in the person of a daughter-in law, and he rightly conceived that such a communication would best be made in person. So he occupied a part of the only forenoon he was in London in writing to his friend Glenvallich an account of the singular deception of which he had become the dupe, together with the manner in which it had been so speedily detected, adding his intention of spending a day with his mother on his way northward. To Isabelle he wrote a few affectionate lines, informing her of the fortunate removal of one source at least of his disquietude, an omen from which he augured well for their future happiness; and adding his hopes that, in a very few days more, he should have the delight of beholding her again in perfect health and in renewed spirits.

The surprise of Lady Tresham may be conceived at sight of a son whom she believed to be at that time buried along with his sister in the depths of the Scottish Highlands, a *terra incognita*, concerning which the good lady possessed no very definite idea. For the communication concerning his purposed change of condition, she had already been prepared by the letters of her daughter; and Lady Tresham had interfered too little with her sons, even at an earlier period of their lives, to question their free agency now. She was gratified by seeing Henry, but never thought of soliciting him to prolong his visit when he spoke of immediately pursuing his northward journey, or of repining at its shortness. Fate had, however, ordained that his progress was to be delayed, and that by an event as painful as it was unexpected.

On the morning after his arrival at Mitchley, as he sat at breakfast with his mother, a letter with a black seal, and bearing a foreign post-mark, was handed to her. The poor lady started as she received it, and opened it with a trembling hand.

“Almighty God! my son!” she exclaimed, and fell back almost inanimate in her chair. It was too true: the letter, which was dated from Smyrna, and written by the consul at that place, conveyed the afflicting intelligence that Sir Thomas Tresham, whose health had for some time been drooping, had unfortunately accelerated the fatal crisis by the fatigue of an expedition he had undertaken to explore

certain antiquities in the Troad. In consequence of heat and exhaustion, a blood-vessel had given way in the lungs, and before any effectual assistance could be obtained, the unfortunate gentleman had expired, attended only by his servants.

The heart-struck mother was conveyed to her chamber, where every tender attention was lavished on her by Henry; and in less than three hours more, her youngest son, Richard, whom we have before mentioned as having taken orders, arrived post to comfort and assist his mother. *He* also had received intelligence of the event which deprived him of a brother, and, ignorant of Henry's presence, had hastened to Mitchley.

Tresham had loved his elder brother fondly and sincerely. There was in the character of Thomas a cast of high-toned generosity and exalted benignity eminently calculated to win the love and confidence of a frank, warm-hearted boy, such as Henry was when he best remembered his brother; and the numerous instances of kindness and considerate attention which he had received from one so much his senior, and to whom, by both father and mother, he was taught to look up with respect, sunk deep into a mind which never forgot a benefit.

In truth, the love which Henry bore his brother savoured more of the reverential adoration which we experience for some remote and exalted object,—some being whose superior excellencies seldom come within our sphere of observation,—than

of the affection which usually subsists between brothers and equals. Difference of age and lapse of time might in some degree account for this peculiarity of feeling, but the superiority with which the memory or fancy of Tresham had invested his absent brother was by no means destitute of foundation.

Sir Thomas was, in truth, a character of no ordinary stamp; but the energy of a mind endowed with talents of a high order, luminous, penetrating, and ardent in the pursuit of information, was but ill seconded by the weak and frail body in which it was confined: conscious infirmity checked its enthusiasm, and threw a shade of sobered feeling over a spirit which was naturally cheerful and even lively. The depressing effects of constitutional ill health, and those silent but emphatic intimations which warn the sufferer of approaching fate, were written in painfully legible characters upon the pale brow and sunken cheek of the interesting invalid; and it was more perhaps the consciousness of impending and inevitable death, and the reluctance at lingering an object of anxiety and distress to those whom he best loved, than either hope of recovery or the love of travel and information, that induced Sir Thomas to linger and droop unseen in a foreign land. It was a morbid feeling, but one frequently nourished in high-toned minds, sickened by brooding over visions of decay and of death, and unaccustomed, perhaps, to draw with sufficient freedom from the

only source that can afford efficient comfort and consolation under circumstances of pain and suffering.

The grief which Tresham felt for his brother was deep and sincere as the admiration and affection he entertained for his character ; nor was it for some time that his mind could admit the consolation to be gathered from viewing the brighter side of the picture. But we should only incur the charge of inconsistent affectation were we to deny that, ere long, our hero began to discover that by this sad event the difficulties which had opposed his union with Isabelle Stewart would be entirely removed ;—nay, that he would now have it in his power, should it be needful, to render prompt and effectual assistance to her father.

The presence of his brother Richard rendered his own unnecessary at the family seat, and certain legal forms and arrangements connected with his succession to the estate and title, rendered it expedient that he should return to town. So bidding adieu to his mother, whom he consigned to the care of his brother Richard, on the third day after the painful tidings had reached him he was on the road to London.

It was during this journey, that ruminating on the remarkable succession of events which had occurred during the preceding fortnight, his thoughts again turned upon the singular piece of deception which had occasioned his recent

journey. This current of reflection naturally carried him back to the peculiar and critical situation of the Airdruthmore family, and doubtless the pensive tone of his mind was favourable to the indulgence of these visionary presentiments which had overpowered the spirits of Isabelle, and even deranged his own equanimity. The wild predictions of old Elsie took their full place and share in these moods of the fancy, and at length he worked himself up to believe that some connexion must certainly exist between the object of Elsie's alarms and that of the malicious author of the anonymous and forged letters which had so completely duped him. Once impressed with such an idea, his anxiety and uneasiness became intolerable. He hurried over his business in London; a prolongation of leave to *Sir Henry* Tresham was yet more easy of attainment than to plain *Captain* Tresham. His military and legal agents did the needful, and in four days our hero was once more in the mail, on his way to Airdruthmore.

Assuredly, there is no situation a man can be placed in, so favourable to the reflective mood, as that of a night journey in his Majesty's mail coach. Snugly ensconced in his own particular corner—his travelling cap pulled over his eyes, his warm cloke wrapped snugly round him—immersed to the nose in the ample folds of his *comforter*—the guard strictly charged, as he values

his own gratuity, to suffer no intrusive Jarvey to molest his repose with, "Coachman, gentlemen, if you please"—his fellow travellers, all alike quiescently disposed in their night gear; their limbs accommodately intermingled,—what is there to disturb his lucubrations, or—his slumbers?—Without a halt beyond what is required to effect an almost magical change of horses, without a sound, except the monotonous whirl of the wheels, away—away he flies; the slight motion which capital springs and admirable roads alone admit of, being calculated rather to soothe than to rouse him from the sleeping or waking dream in which he may be indulging.

Unhappily, Tresham was in no degree disposed for either mental or bodily slumber. His mind, harassed by a succession of exciting incidents, experienced that painful lassitude which is still more the consequence of intellectual than physical exhaustion; for who has not experienced that restless languor which oppresses the jaded mind after a severe struggle of the feelings or the judgment, forbidding alike the relief of repose or of abstraction? Spiritless and depressed, his thoughts wandered, from the image of his dying brother—dying in a foreign land, unattended, save by strangers and hirelings, without a friend to whom he might confide his last wishes—to the beloved group which he was so soon to rejoin, as he hoped, in health and happiness. But did his heart respond

to these trembling hopes?—did it not rather shrink with secret, unacknowledged dread, from the obscure forebodings which it sought in vain to throw off.

In vain did he reason with himself to conquer this visionary weakness; in vain did he repeat, “It is always thus with the objects of our most anxious interest, and most so when nearest of attainment. The struggle for the prize is ever most severe when we approach the goal; and the anticipations of possible failure are never so distressing as when the crisis is nearest at hand. What cause—what reasonable cause can I have for anxiety? Is not Glenvallich, the true and the prudent Glenvallich, there, to guard and to counsel? and what, after all, *can* than there be to dread?”—Still however, his spirits remained depressed, his soul refused to take its rest, the extraordinary device which had been made use of to withdraw him from his post at Airdruthmore, at so interesting a period, would recur with a thrill of uneasiness proportioned to the mystery which involved the whole transaction.

Even the short and troubled slumbers, which brought no refreshment to the traveller, were disturbed by imaginary terrors, and his dreams assumed the same oppressive character which marked his waking visions. Constantly did he imagine that he saw his mistress in the hands of ruffians, who were dragging her from his view, while she

shrieked to him for assistance, and stretched out her arms for that aid which some invisible power withheld him from affording. Sometimes it was black Kenneth, sometimes Ballytully and his uncle that were the ravishers; at other times, they assumed the distorted forms which mock the fancy in dreams, and a confused succession of images and actors would hurry through his brain, in rapid and bewildering whirl. And though the cheerful face of day would dispel the phantoms for a while, the next doze, or the next night-fall, would renew the despondency of his mind, or the misery of his sleeping visions.

In due course of time however, and without either accident or delay, Tresham arrived in the Highlands, and left the coach at the point from whence he might easiest reach Airdruthmore. Post horses, at that period, and particularly in that season of the year, were not to be had—so impatient of delay, and disregarding fatigue, he threw himself on the back of the first horse that could be procured, and hurried onwards. A dark and blustering night had been succeeded by a cold gloomy morning; nor did the advancing day belie the black and stormy character of the month, for February was now far advanced, as Tresham wrestling with a violent wind, and frequent showers of snow, pressed forward up Strath Einort, in the fond but trembling hope of a warm welcome and a blythe evening to reward his toils.

The shades of evening were advancing as the traveller approached the well-known spot; and while he urged his jaded beast, his eyes were eagerly strained to catch a sight of some familiar form. "But they can have no idea of my being so near," thought he, "and yet I wrote—see there arise the smokes from those hospitable chimneys;—ah! there are neither cold hearths nor cold hearts there; all warm, cordial, affectionate; but who would be out of doors, at such a time of night and in such weather?"

He was mistaken; for assuredly he did observe a figure moving among the leafless trees as he approached the offices; its motions were those of one in haste—another followed and another—it was the gardener, and old Saunders Morrison, the grieve—he could have sworn to the heavy rolling gait of the last. Scarcely had he advanced a few paces, when some female figures made their appearance, but their gestures did not resemble those of persons expecting an arrival. They ran rapidly to and fro, as if under the influence of agitation. During these observations, which occupied not half the time required to record them, Tresham had approached so near as to recognize other individuals of the party, and at length saw the good old laird himself, bareheaded, with his grey hair streaming in the wind, rush forth with distracted gestures.

The young man's heart died within him:—a

thousand terrible conclusions rushed into his mind, at this apparent confirmation of all his gloomy anticipations. As his horse carried him up to the group, who, seeing his approach, had clustered together, and stopped short, as if to hear his tidings, he could scarcely dismount from the wearied animal, when overcome at once by fatigue and anguish of mind he staggered, and fell almost insensible at the feet of Airdruthmore.

CHAPTER XI.

CONSTERNATION AND PERPLEXITY.

The good man struck with horror, cried aloud,
And drew around him an astonished crowd;
The friends and servants to the father ran,
To share the sorrows of the good old man.

LITTLE had occurred at Airdruthmore to disturb the monotonous tranquillity of its inmates, for several days after Tresham's departure. In due time, their anxiety regarding him was relieved by the letters which he wrote from London; and Isabelle had in some measure regained her usual tone of spirits. The regular and still flattering accounts which from time to time were received from their agent in Edinburgh, concerning the progress of his inquiries, tended materially to maintain their equanimity, which was only disturbed at intervals by the distressing apprehensions and warnings of old Elsie Macleod.

From the day of Tresham's last visit, the poor

old woman had never left her bed; her mental aberrations had increased, as well as her bodily weakness; and it was obvious to all that saw her, that she was at length gradually sinking into the grave she had longed so much to reach. In proportion to the helplessness and infirmity of her nurse, so did the tenderness and attention of Isabelle increase. Few days passed without her visiting the old woman at her cottage, to which, however, she never went unattended, either by her friend Miss Tresham, or Glenvallich; and these visits were chiefly employed on the part of Isabelle, in soothing the troubled spirit of the aged invalid—on her part in ejaculating blessings on her dear child, and giving vent to dark premonitions of impending calamity, mingled with execrations, as it seemed, against those whom she dreaded as the authors of the evil.

At times, the old woman's intellect would clear a little; and though, as usual, nothing very distinct could be elicited from her upon the subject of her apprehensions, she would endeavour to console her young mistress, prepare her to endure inevitable evil, and to maintain constancy and courage under unavoidable trials. "It's a' in *His* hand, my dear," she would say, "and the wisdom or the power o' man canna change a written doom. Put ye your trust in the Most High, darlin', an' it's no the might o' the wicked that can pluck you out o' the hollow of *His* hand, or from the shadow of *His*

arm!—But ochone! it canna but be a sore trial!—a fearful wrestling!—-an' may the Lord himself strengthen you, maithal, against that day and hour!"

Isabelle had long ceased attempting to extract from her old nurse any more precise explanation of the object of these mysterious intimations. She looked upon them in some degree as the wanderings of a restless and disordered spirit; but, imbued herself by nature with a slightly superstitious tinge, and from thence probably inclined to regard with some respect the oracular communications of her nurse, she could not altogether reject their prophetic character, and conceived them to refer entirely to the embarrassments which at that very time afflicted the family. Still they produced their effect, and contributed to repress the buoyancy of her spirits when inclined at any time to rejoice in the improvement which appeared in the family prospects.

About this time, rumours began to arise that some of the dangerous and evil-disposed persons who, since the memorable expedition to Glen Shlichard had disappeared from the country side, had again been observed in the vicinity of that place, and were supposed to be lurking in some of their old haunts among the mountains bordering the glen. At first Glenvallich was scarcely disposed to pay much attention to these reports; or, at least to own that he was so; but when he heard it men-

tioned that they had even approached the neighbourhood of Airdruthmore, and that several men, obviously desirous of concealment, had been remarked among the woods and in the glen of the Ruth, he deemed it proper to take measures for ascertaining the fact, and the object of the intruders, should any be in reality discovered.

The result of these inquiries was vague and unsatisfactory. A herd boy, for instance, in search of stray cows, had seen what he denominated "a wild-looking man," crouching among the copse-wood in the hill; but on questioning him regarding the appearance of this formidable apparition, it did not seem clearly made out that the object which had alarmed him was in reality human. A workman, who had been sent to repair a bit of the walk in the glen, gave a more distinct account. He had seen, he said, two men, not in the walks, but among the rocks which overhung them; and he thought that the sun, which sometimes broke through the clouds, had glinted on some bright substance like arms—the butt-end of a pistol, or some such object. He had, it appeared by his own showing, been somewhat timorous as to approaching them at first, and when he came to the resolution of doing so, the men had disappeared. There were some still more vague and mysterious hints dropped by others who were examined on the subject; nor were there wanting those who, with true Highland credulity and superstition, were dis-

posed to refer the whole affair to supernatural causes. They asserted that the forms were those of unreal beings, such as the *Benshie*, and sent on purpose to confirm the truth of old Elsie's predictions,—to intimate the approach of evil to the ancient house of Airdruthmore. A letter from Tresham some days after, communicating the death of his elder brother, had however the effect of changing the object of these good folks' alarm, while it confirmed their opinions; for they immediately fathered the mysterious appearances which had perplexed the neighbourhood, upon the sad event which was thus brought to the knowledge of the family. "Eh, sirs!" exclaimed they with pious commiseration, "an' was na' it eneugh to gar the dead rise out o' their graves, and for wraiths an' bogles to run scurrying through the country side whan the puir ying man deed among thae haithen Turks, awa' so far from kith an' clan—an' his brother an' sister so muckle at the place? Sure eneugh, it was for that, an' nothing else, that ould Elsie's ben sae wild an' fashious—aye, she'll be quait noo wi' her evil dreams and taishchs."

And whether Elsie was quiet or no, her daily groans were less attended to. Isabelle continued her visits; but from the time when these unpleasant reports began to prevail, Glenvallich would not permit the young ladies to go to the glen unattended by himself, as it was just possible they

might meet with some troublesome or insolent person on the way. Isabelle willingly complied with this injunction, and accepting his company, or attended by a trusty servant, persevered in her visits to the cottage without a single occurrence to justify alarm. It was but three days previous to the return of Tresham, that Glenvallich, who till then had remained entirely at Airdruthmore, received a pressing call to see his factor. The messenger stated, that this gentleman had been severely hurt by a fall from his horse, and had expressed great anxiety to see his master with the least possible delay, at the remote farm-house where he lay. Anxious to administer to the poor man's comfort, Glenvallich hurried away, purposing to return with all convenient speed, and hoping then to render up in safety his charge to the friend who had intrusted him with so precious a deposit.

On the afternoon of the day at which our narrative has arrived, the weather which, in the morning, had been stormy and blustering, cleared up a little; and Isabelle, who had prepared herself to take a short walk with her friend, was lounging about the shrubberies, when a lad running up, informed her hastily that he was sent to request she would instantly repair to the cottage of her nurse, "for they're sayin', mem, that she's no *expectit*,* an' she's crying out for you, mem, an' the lassie canna lave her, for she's wild, wild!"

* To live, videlicet.

“Elsie dying!—God bless me—poor creature!” said Isabelle, and telling him to inform Miss Tresham of the circumstance, and that she was gone to the cottage, she quickened her pace, and was soon out of sight. From that time Miss Stewart had not been seen. The lad, not immediately finding Miss Tresham, had quitted the shrubbery without further stay; nor was it until the subsequent inquiry had induced him to come forward, and declare the circumstances we have stated, that they became known. Miss Tresham, not finding her friend, imagined that she had taken some other direction, and after seeking her for some time, and prolonging her walk till driven in by a fresh blast, had returned to the house. Thus some time elapsed before any of the family became aware of the young lady’s absence.

“Where left ye Belle, Miss Tresham, my dear?” said Airdruthmore, as that young lady entered the drawing-room, after throwing aside her cloke and bonnet, “the night’s getting coarse and cold—what can she be after?”

“Indeed, sir, I don’t know; I have not seen Isabelle at all—we were going out together, but she gave me the slip, and we did not meet again.”

“God bless me!—where can she have gone?—I wish she would not be so foolish;—and by herself too, after what Glenvallich said—very wrong, very wrong.”

“I dare say she won’t be long, sir; the cold and

the dark will soon drive her in, and this ugly blast—ugh !”

“ Ugly enough, by my conscience—what *can* be keeping Belle? I wish,” said he to the servant, who just then entered the room, “ that some of you would go and see after Miss Stewart. Ask if any one saw which way she went.”

“ Yes, sir,” replied the man, “ but there’s the housekeeper has been asking about young mistress, and the gardener’s boy says he saw her going the way of old Elsie’s, more than two hours ago.”

“ Two hours ago !—why, surely she can’t have been staying there all this time ?—send off immediately to see if Miss Stewart is there, and to attend her home if she is.”

A man was accordingly sent, but scarcely had he gone a third of the way, when he met Elsie’s lassie running to the house with all her might, who told him that his young lady was not, and had not been at the glen, but that the old woman was groanin’ an’ cryan’, an’ wantin’ to see Airdruthmore or any of the gentlemen, an’ taking on in a terrible fashion. This intelligence set the whole house in a ferment. If not at Elsie’s, where could Miss Stewart possibly be? and some of the farm servants hearing of the circumstance, went off of themselves in different directions to search for their young mistress, for night was now approaching, and uneasiness was on every brow.

Among others who were attracted by the flying

rumours, the lad who had given Miss Stewart the message about Elsie, made his appearance, and stated what he knew about the matter. He said that a man whom he did not know, and to whose appearance he had paid no particular attention, had come running to him with the information he had given to his mistress, adding, that Elsie's girl not being herself able to quit the old woman, had sent him with this errand. The alarm which had been gradually increasing with the prolonged absence of Miss Stewart, became general at this information. A false pretence had obviously been employed to entice the young lady to a place which it appeared she had never reached. A thrill of horror seized the good old laird; "My child! my child! they have murdered her!" exclaimed he in piercing accents; "for the love of God, come one and all of you and seek her!" and in spite of all attempts to stay him, he rushed out of doors. It was at this moment of perplexity and alarm that Tresham so critically arrived; and his situation was a fresh and severe shock to the distracted old man. Tresham! O Harry!—dead?—he dead too? O God have mercy on me!" The servants now bustled about Tresham, raised him and bore him into the house, where by application of the usual means, he recovered a little. A glass of warm wine and water had completed his restoration to consciousness, before his sister, who had been roused by the increasing bustle, entered and saw him.

The meeting of the brother and sister was tender and affectionate. The sense of their recent loss had for the time subdued the more mercurial particles of Maria's nature, and permitted her better feelings to have full play. But the return of consciousness brought to Tresham a recollection of the scene which had in so great a degree been the proximate cause of his disorder. "Good Heavens, Maria! where is Isabelle?" was his first demand, as passing his hand across his brow, he gazed around in search of her.

"Ah! where indeed! where is she?" exclaimed the old man, wringing his hands. "O Harry, she's gone! she's gone that loved you well!—they've murder'd her!—but what are ye all at, that ye are na looking after her?—let me go—let me go;—Tresham we must find her—the night's closing in—"

"In the name of Heaven, sir!" exclaimed the young man, trembling with horror, "what do you mean? What dreadful thing has happened? For God's sake tell me of Isabelle? Where is Glenvallich?"

"She's gone, Harry! she's gone! there's not three hours since she was here, safe and well—and now, O my God! what may have befallen her!"

"But, sir—but, Harry," said Miss Tresham, "you are all distracted, I think—why do you talk in this way? Isabelle may after all be well—or she may have fallen and hurt herself, and is perhaps

unable to move from the spot where she lies—you have no good cause to fear worse, surely ! This is not a country where people are murdered within a mile of their own houses—let us all go and seek for her ; no doubt we shall find her ; and this is not a night for her, poor soul, to be out in ; she may die while we stand here gaping and wringing our hands.”

“ But, Maria, and you, sir, do have pity on me, and tell me what you do know.”

“ It’s little that we know, Harry, but much we have to dread,” replied the old gentleman, and he endeavoured to explain to Tresham the occurrences of the past fortnight in so far as they bore upon the mysterious disappearance of Isabelle, and detailing the few facts that were known regarding it.

“ My God ! did I not feel this ? ” exclaimed Tresham. “ Dear Isabelle ! O were not thy failing spirits and thy boding fears but too well founded—she fore-knew this—and I—yet I sought to laugh her out of her terrors ! But let us be doing ; you are right, Maria—let us set off at once to seek the dear girl. O if we had but the smallest clue ! ”

It was suggested by one of the servants, that the road to Elsie’s cottage should be strictly searched. “ You say true,” replied Tresham ; “ and she sent for us, did she not ? I will go there instantly myself.”

“But stay, dear Harry, you are faint with hunger—for her sake if not for your own, take some refreshment.”

“I could not eat now; I could not swallow a morsel, Maria; but this will give me strength;” and as he spoke, he swallowed a large glass of wine. “Now let me go.”

“And I will go with you, Harry,” said the laird, buttoning his coat with much alacrity.

“No, my dear sir, no; I beg you will not attempt it. To Elsie’s cottage I must go alone—I shall do better by myself. Pray direct the rest in their search—you will do more good that way. The men may go through the woods, but I must go to the cottage alone.”

Accompanied by the gardener and his lad who had last seen Miss Stewart on the way to the wood, Tresham then hastened towards the old woman’s solitary cottage. A workman much employed by Isabelle in the glen of the Ruth, undertook to explore the paths and walks in that sequestered place; and parties, headed or directed by the principal servants, spread in other directions. The night was closing in as they left the house, and the twinkling of the lanthorns which they carried showed strangely and ominously among the dark wood into which they soon plunged. The lad pointed out the place where he had seen his young mistress, and from thence they commenced a close and anxious search; but not a trace could they

find to guide them. They shouted and hollowed, but the echoes of their own voices or the faint answering halloos of their companions who were similarly employed, was the only reply. "Continue your search," said Tresham to the gardener; "look well into the hollow on the left, in case that by accident your young mistress may have fallen there; I shall push on for the cottage."

Casting quick and piercing glances on either side as he hurried rapidly along, Tresham soon reached the well-known hollow in which stood the cottage of Elsie. Its dark outline was scarcely discernible in the gloom, and one feeble ray glimmered from its little casement, like the faint vital spark which yet lingered in the bosom of its frail inhabitant. He entered the solitary dwelling; and if his heart had been susceptible of any other impression than that of the misery which filled it, he would have been struck with the still, forlorn, dreary solemnity of the scene within. The silence of death itself seemed to reign in the place: the dying embers of a neglected fire lay smouldering on the hearth; and as a fragment occasionally fell among the ashes, the sparks which arose cast a momentary gleam around. By this fitful and uncertain light, Tresham could just perceive a human figure, motionless as a corpse, stretched upon the low couch; and his flesh crept upon his bones, when he marked the pale unearthly lustre

of the glassy eyes, as they caught the reflection of the occasional spark.

The silence of the old woman seemed to hint that all was over, that death had already claimed his own; but the painful thrill which agitated the young man's breast, was after some moments allayed by the faint sound of her voice. "Ye are ow'r late, young man—ye are ow'r late!" said she, in broken sepulchral tones; "an' I said ye wud be so—I warned ye, but ye wudna listen—I counselled ye, an' ye scorned my words—an' noo it's a' come to pass—she's in the hands o' fierce and wicked men, an' your help comes ow'r late."

"In the name of God, Elsie, cease these reproaches," said Tresham; "I never scorned either you or your warnings, heaven knows;—what I did I was forced to do, and that you well know; but now, for the sake of her whose love you had, and whose bread you have eaten, tell me, if you can, what has become of Isabelle Stewart."

"He that knoweth all things alone can tell that," replied the old woman, with solemnity; "had ye but stayed by her whom it was weel your part to watch and guard, ye would never have had to mourn her loss, or ask that question. 'Whom God hath joined,' saith the Scripture, 'let no man put asunder;' an' was *ye* no' joined, then? Had ye no' her hale heart—her sweet and innocent heart? An' yet ye left her?—but whom the Lord sees fit to visit wi' his chastening, he blindeth that they

may not see—it is His will, and who shall question it?”

“Elsie, my good Elsie! you loved Isabelle—and well did she love you. If you know—if you can guess—if you have but the slightest suspicion of what has befallen her, I conjure you tell me plainly.—Let us not lose precious time.”

“An’ woe be to Elsie, young man, if she does na answer to that call! But what can Elsie say?—blind, weak, an’ helpless, like Balaam to Balak, she can but utter what the Lord puts in her mouth.”

“And have you no suspicions then, Elsie?” said the young man, with a tone of disappointment.

“Suspensions!—aye, strong and fell suspicions—suspicions only short o’ certainty. But o’ what use are they?”

“For God’s sake name them, at all events! What and whom do you suspect?”

“An’ are ye blinder than the blind, young man? Has the Lord darkened the eyes o’ your judgment that ye canna understand, or stopped your ears that ye canna hear? Have ye seen the evil one, and heard him, an’ most felt his force, an’ can ye na yet perceive? Twice that ye ken o’ was your life in danger from his hand; an’ often has the arm o’ the Lord been a shield ow’r your head, when ye saw na the blow that hung over it. An’ is there need for me to mint at the name I canna and I maunna speak?”

“Kenneth Dhoruv!—black Kenneth, the smuggler!” exclaimed Tresham, starting.

“Aye, black Kenneth, or Dougald, or twenty other names if ye like. Him it is, as sure as the sun shines in the heavens! and in the hands o’ a blacker villain, a helpless woman needna an’ canna be!”

“But, good heavens, Elsie! what leads you to suppose this? Yet I need not ask, for I remember you always said it was he that would work us evil. But have you any sufficient cause for this suspicion?”

“An’ what better cause wud I seek, than the word that the Lord puts in my heart? But other cause is na wanting. Listen, an’ ye’ll hear it. There’s but four days bygone, since, lying as I now am upon this bed that I’ll never rise from, and thinking on the days that’s awa’, an’ o’ my dear mistress that’s in heaven, an’ wondering if I wud ever see her there, I heard the souch o’ a man’s voice coming down the brae on the wun. My flesh gied a grue, ere I kent what it was; but the very next breath tould the truth—for the voice was his ye ken o’, and he was talking to another; and that other was the same that was wi’ him on the day ye weel may mind o’—for it was thon same when my darling was wi’ me, an’ *ye* cam’ an’ drove the evil speerit awa’—ye’ll mind o’ it *noo*. If it wasna for the dreams that ’ill whiles come ow’r me, an’ mak’ me doubt whether I’m wauking

or asleep, I might have kent by what I heard that day, that the evil one was abroad; but I doubted what I feared and what I hated, an' the day I'm suffering for it. It's no' bye three hours ago, since, wide awake as I was, I heard the same voices; an' 'ore ever I cud weel think a thought, there cam a skriekh that made my ould heart loup within my briest—for O, Mr. Tresham! it was *hersel'* that uttered it, and I kent in the very moment what was doing; an' there I lay helpless and fusionless like a broken reed, while the child o' my heart's blood—the daughter o' her that I loved next to Heaven itsel'—was carried awa' by a band o' bloody villains!" And the poor creature, while she spoke, trembled and quivered as if still struggling under her painful excitement.

"There was but one more fearful cry," continued she, "and then my ould ears could hear the smothered fechtin' o' the dear lamb, as she tried in vain to call for the help that was far awa'! The hardened wretches! they had watched her as she came alone to see her ould dying nurse, an' they keppit her most on the very threshold! But the Lord will confound their wickedness, and bring their devices to nought!"

"And what can have induced them to commit this outrage, Elsie? and where can they possibly have carried the dear girl?"

"I canna tell—I canna say! but it's no to serve their own purposes, that's sure. I dinna ken

why, but it's born in upon me that yon wild randy, Ballytully's at the bottom o' it a'. For them that heard him say the words, tould me how mad he was that my darling scorned him, and how he swore he wud have vengeance. But I scorned the wretch mysel', an' his anger too—an' now I'm ruing it, for I'm feart he's keepit his word, an' there's no one o' these wild Highland catherans but wud do his bidding."

"But if that were the case, Elsie, there would surely be neither fear of outrage or violence, that's some comfort—they dare not insult the daughter of Airdruthmore?"

"I'se warrant, no!" said Elsie, with something of defiance in her tone; "it's no a house to thole an affront. But, ochone! what can we know? Life may be safe, unless honour seek the sacrifice!—but they daur na—they daur na!"

"For God's sake, Elsie! don't think of it, or speak of it. But where could they carry her?—where could they conceal her?"

"That's more than I can tell; but one thing's sure, it canna be her blood they're seeking—they hae some wicked end to gain, an' to hide in the Highlands is na hard for a season. But ye'll hae Glenvallich here the nicht—that's a sure thing; an' a true friend is Glenvallich, an' weel did he watch for you, Mr. Tresham, till the day he was wyled awa'. Let you, an' him, an' your friends seek the hale country side; the more work ye mak',

the less chance they will hae to keep their prize. Try thae wild houffs about Glen Shlichard—they may cheat the king an' brew whisky in spite o' the excise—the fouks o' Glen Shlichard—but they wunna hide murder, nor wink at robbery and violence. It's your foreign villains that are up to thae fearfu' crimes, an' no ow'r kindly Highlanders, unless they 're spoilt by foreign breeding. Trust my word, ye'll no leave Glen Shlichard 'ore ye'll hae news o' her that's lost. Dinna sleep on't, Mr. Tresham; but the nicht's dark, ye can do no good e'en noo—ye mau tak' the morning to the work. And be sure that ye'll see me again afore ye leave the Strath; whatever hour it be, ye'll find me wauking. There's no rest for me till I'll hear that my darling child's under her father's roof again, and then I'll wun awa'. Let me only ken that, an' I'll bless God and lay down my weary head and die. An' noo let me be, Mr. Tresham; for my heart's full, an' my speerit's weary, and I wud pray to the Lord to strengthen and enlighten me; an' the Lord wunna shut his ears against the prayer o' the poor and the afflicted. So go ye home, comfort the sorrowful family, and be sure ye see me in the morning."

Tresham left the old woman, lightened if not actually comforted; for he felt that in all probability her reasoning was well founded, and that those who had secured her person could have no design upon her life. The hint by which she di-

rected his suspicions against Ballytully found an echo in his own thoughts, although he was at a loss to conceive what object that person could purpose to achieve by such an outrage, unless it might be a miserable attempt at intimidating the family into compliance with his views. Painful as was the uncertainty which hung over the fate of his mistress, Tresham could not bring himself to imagine that she could be subjected to any positive insult. The days of such occurrences were gone by, and the young Englishman endeavoured to persuade himself that the worst which could result from an adventure so formidable in its aspect, would be the terror and fatigue to which Isabelle would necessarily be exposed. Doubtless a recollection of Elsie's prophetic hints, which always pointed at his ultimate union with her dear child as a certain event, had their share in effecting this persuasion; and however loth to admit the humiliating truth, his confidence was undoubtedly the greater, that he had already found such frequent occasion to acknowledge the correctness of her oracular predictions.

On returning to the house, Tresham found it still in the same painful confusion. No tidings—not a hint had been obtained of the lost Isabelle, so that even the communications of Tresham, vague and hypothetical as they were, conveyed some rays of comfort to the afflicted father, who leant upon the opinion and relied upon the energy

of Tresham with a blind dependence, which would have been painful to the young Englishman, had he not seen the necessity of some such support to the old man in this trying hour.

The parties were assembling at a late and very melancholy meal, when the arrival of guests was announced by the sound of horses and of voices without, and in another moment the appearance of Glenvallich in the dinner-room was hailed with a burst of something almost like joy. It is in times of affliction and distress that we feel the real value of a friend, in whose worth and integrity we can rely with unbounded security. The sound sense and sagacity for which Glenvallich was so remarkable, qualified him in a peculiar manner as an adviser on all trying occasions, and perhaps no event could have occurred to the distressed family at Airdruthmore so cheering and gratifying as the arrival of that gentleman among them.

“ I dreaded something of this sort,” said Glenvallich, “ when I found that I myself had been decoyed away from hence upon a false pretence. You may suspect me of carelessness to my trust, my dear Tresham, but all here can witness how anxiously I watched over it until cheated into an imprudent security, and inveigled from my post. There has been a deep-laid plot and much deception employed in compassing this foul deed, so much that I think the scheme must fall to pieces and detect itself; but in the mean time, what we

ought to prepare for is, of course, a vigorous and active search. I do believe the old woman has hit upon the right scent, Tresham; Ballytully and his smuggling friends are, I would take large odds, the culprits."

"Well, I am almost inclined to believe so too, were it only from the total absence of grounds to impute the outrage elsewhere. But I own I can't comprehend what sufficient motive he can have for so wanton a piece of violence; he can't surely propose to force Isabelle into a marriage?"

"What a desperate man may purpose or attempt, we can't calculate on; but such may not be an unlikely object."

"Why, good heavens! that would be utter madness! We are past the days of abduction of women surely!"

"Yes; and I think that Isabelle's firmness and good sense have every chance of foiling the intrigues and violence of which she has been made the object; at all events, time will be gained by resistance, although she may be subjected to much personal annoyance and persecution."

"O, that is the misery! Poor, poor, dear Isabelle! that is what tortures me! and no aid near! it's madness to think of it," exclaimed Tresham, writhing under the violence of his feelings.

"Come, come, my dear fellow, there's no use in distressing yourself; we must keep fresh for

action, and have all our wits about us. Have you arranged any plan of proceeding?"

"We have had little time for that as yet; we are but just returned from a search about the grounds, and I have not left Old Elsie an hour. I have promised to see her in the morning before we go on a wider quest."

"Well, I think that may be proper too. But listen to what I have done, and what I propose; we can modify the plan of operations as you see fit hereafter. You know that I was called away the day before yesterday by an alarm regarding my factor, who was said to be dangerously hurt, dying, at a farm of mine. I should have made stricter inquiry into the matter; but never for a moment imagining a doubt of the fact, I made the best of my way to the place. The instant that I discovered the whole to be a trick, the truth flashed upon me; I concluded that I must have been decoyed out of the way to admit of the execution of some nefarious design which my presence might have prevented. I remembered the reports of suspicious characters haunting about this place—you know what reason we have had to doubt the honesty of the laird of Ballytully, and therefore you need not wonder that my suspicions very soon fell on him. So strong were these suspicions, that without delay I dispatched a messenger, on whom I could rely, to the house of that gentleman, with orders to learn whether he was

there; if not, to discover where he was supposed to be, and whether any circumstances of a suspicious nature had occurred either at Ballytully or at the other resorts of the laird.

“I also dispatched Rob Macian—you remember him, Tresham?—to Glen Shlichard, for you see I had imbibed Old Elsie’s ideas on the subject, (though perhaps not upon the same grounds,) that our old friends had some part to act in the impending mischief. Rob will collect what he can regarding the motions of Ballytully and his myrmidons; and if any thing of an unusual nature should pass there, he will assuredly discover and inquire into it. I assure you I had a secret anticipation of another visit to that place, and thought it best to be prepared. Having taken every precaution that occurred to me, I lost no time in returning hither; but as it was impossible to guess what might be required next, I thought it as well to bring a reinforcement with me; so three stout determined fellows, along with your old friends Duncan Maccombich and Kenny, walked across the hill, while I rode the pony.”

“My dear Charles, you are a true friend, kind, considerate,” exclaimed Tresham, wringing his hand; “you’ve a head worth all of ours put together; and what, then, would you suggest for the morrow? we should start long before daylight.”

“Pardon me, Harry, that would do no good;

we shall require full daylight if we mean to follow track. As Old Elsie has so fortunately heard enough to give us some idea of the spot where Miss Stewart met the ruffians, we must examine that place carefully, for traces to indicate the road they took. Let us strike the scent from first starting, and we may then have some chance of following it up. Let us see Old Elsie, we may glean something from her; and then, unless there should be strong reason against it, we ought certainly, I think, to make for Glen Shlichard—for there, or near it, I have little doubt the fellows would seek their first hiding place.”

“I quite agree with you, Charles, and we can spread in several lines, to increase our chance of success.”

“Assuredly, and trusty people may also be dispatched in other directions, for the chance of falling in with intelligence. But above all, information must be sent to the authorities—the procurator fiscal and sheriff substitute at ———, who will take all requisite official measures. That is due to the public as well as to ourselves, although our best dependence may be upon our own exertions.”

“My dear Glenvallich,” said the laird, who had been listening eagerly, but with a sad bewildered air, to all that had passed, “I don’t know how to thank you; but ye may be sure that I feel your kindness, and will do so as long as I live. What should I have done in all this sad work without

you and Tresham there? But what part am *I* to take in this unhappy affair? am I to sit idle when all of you are on the alert?"

"My dear sir," replied Glenvallich, "we hope you will stay at home, and keep order there; receive tidings and intelligence, and provide for whatever may become needful to be done here. You could not well accompany nor assist us, and you shall have due notice of all that goes on. And now, Tresham, you have had a sore harassing fortnight, enough to knock up a Turkish Tartar; you may have a good spell of work yet before you, so for God's sake get to bed and try to sleep, for we must be stirring betimes."

But little further was said, and that little had reference principally to the projected arrangements of the morrow; for on no other subject could the anxious inmates of Airdruthmore fix their thoughts. Tresham felt the importance of his friend's recommendation. Anxiety, fatigue, and disappointment, had, in truth, borne very hard upon his frame, strongly constituted though it was by nature, and innured by practice to exertion. A feverish aching ran through all his bones; his eyes were burning and his skin was parched—all sorry indications of fitness for the laborious service of the morrow. Sensible of this, he accepted the willing services and sanatory precautions of his good friend Mistress Grizzie Mac Farlane, to insure, if possible, a night's repose; and having thus employed such

human means as were within his reach, he proceeded to solicit more sure and effectual aid from above, for the success of the laudable objects in his view; for Tresham, though a young man and a soldier, was a Christian both in faith and practice. Throwing himself upon his knees, he besought the Almighty disposer of events to vouchsafe to him a share of those blessings which are the life and support of his creatures, and to grant to the hopes and efforts of himself and his friends such success as might seem good to his divine wisdom.

The effect was salutary as the purpose of his soul was pious, and Tresham arose from his devotions calm and consoled; for he felt that he truly was in the hands of that omnipotent and beneficent Being, without whose will not a sparrow falleth, and by whom the very hairs of our head are numbered. He threw himself on the bed, and slept with a profoundness which astonished himself, until awakened the next morning to commence the arrangements and undertake the duties of the day.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PURSUIT.

Ochone ! it was a fearfu' night !

Sic saw I ne'er before,
And fearfu' will it be to thee,
I trow ere it be ow'r.

He's called upon his merry men a'
To follow him to the glen,
An' he's vow'd he'd neither eat nor sleep
Till he got his love again.

THE grey light of a cold winter's morning was just beginning to be streaked by the earliest sunbeam, when Tresham, Glenvallich, and their party quitted Airdruthmore, followed by the prayers and wishes of every creature belonging to the place, and bent their way towards the woods which led to Elsie's cottage. Besides the two foresters, they were accompanied by six stout and willing men, armed with fowling pieces and pistols, or broad-

swords; a force, more than competent, it was presumed, to cope with any band of ruffians that might have been engaged in the outrage. But as it was proposed that they should separate into several parties occasionally, it might neither have been prudent nor safe to proceed with a smaller numerical force.

Having gained the path which led to the cottage, Glenvallich and Tresham descended, and tapped at the door, to ascertain whether its inmate was awake. They had not long to wait, for the hollow voice of the old woman was instantly heard saying,—“Let the evil hand keep its distance, but let the friendly foot enter!” They found Elsie lying in the same position in which Tresham had left her on the preceding evening. Her sunken features and fixed eyes appearing still more ghastly in the cold grey light; for the embers of the fire were low, and scarcely emitted a single spark.

“We have come at your bidding, Elsie,” said Tresham; “we wish to know what further aid you can afford us in our search. And here is Glenvallich, who desires to hear what you can tell of the time and place where the dear child was seized.”

“The arm of Macgillieculloch was never weak when a friend sought its aid—and the blessing o’ one who has ae fut in the grave will rest on him and his.”

“Thanks for your benison, my good dame,”

said Glenvallich, “and be assured that it does not fall on a churlish soil; but tell us, I entreat you, what we require to know.”

“If ye wud find her that’s lost,” replied Elsie, “it’s in the *wast* ye most seek her, and that ’ore the sun rises a second time; for if ye dinna mak’ the better speed, ye’ll never catch the game; if once they get the broad sea atween her and you, it’s no’ the stout hearts or the willing hands that’s wi’ ye that will bring her back.”

“By heaven! Tresham, the old woman may be right!—its an idea that never entered my brain. If Ballytully is in the plot, his foreign connexions may be brought into play, and his foreign miscreants may spirit her off to the Continent—then indeed he might make his own terms.”

“Gracious God! is it possible—O my God! what a thought!” exclaimed Tresham, in agony; “O let us not lose a moment! but when—how—O Elsie, if ever you loved the dear child that’s gone, help us—tell us what we are to do—which way to go!”

“An’ if Elsie cud tell ye all that and more, young man, think ye she wud stay to be bidden twice? But hearken to me, both, for my hours are numbered and my breath is short, and it’s no’ muckle I can speak. Yestreen, after ye left the place, I humbled myself afore my Maker—afore that Almighty Being, at whose fut-stool this frail speerit most soon appear—aye, an’ that surely

afore another week be past ; and I prayed wi' earnestness—I wearied his ears wi' my prayers; aye, I prayed till the sweat stood in could heavy draps on this ould and sapless carcass—that it might be *his* will to show me the truth, that I might be made an instrument in *his* hands for bringing help to the innocent and good, and confusion on the counsels o' the ungodly and the wicked—that He might be pleased to humble the proud and the hard of heart, by making the wake, blind, helpless, miserable creature that his bounty had so long preserved, and his hand had so long upheld for his own wise purposes, the means of showing forth his own glorious power, and catching the wicked in the snares they had set for others. An' my heart burned within me as I prayed, and my brain boiled like a seething pot ; an' then my senses failed me quite, and I thought that my hour was come at last. But at length my eyes were opened, and I felt that my prayers were heard—for I looked, and behold, there was a wild lone bay—an' the mountains were on the right hand and on the left; but the waters were those of the salt sea, for the waves broke upon a shore that was covered wi' wreck and salt sea-weeds. An' as I leuked upon the beach, I seed a pairty o' wild and armed men, an' in the midst o' them there was a horse, an' on the horse there was a maiden ; and her head was bound round wi' a cloth, an' a plaid was wrapped about her arms and her body ;

but as sure as I'm lying in this spot, Mr. Tresham, it was her!—it was your own leal bride, and my own dear child! An' they were hauling her down to the water-side, an' she, poor thing, cudna move hand or fut; an' I seed a black like veshall close by the beach, and she was na like the rest o' the boats o' the place, an' I kent that it was there they were seeking to tak' her. But while they were striving, and running here and running there, an' there was a great to do, there cam' other men doon the brae side an' set upon them, an' there was a wild fecht. An' my ould een turned, an' my heart sickened; but I aye cried to mysel', 'silly coward cratur, are ye frightened to see what ye prayed to behold? are ye na fit to do your Maker's bidding?' But it a' passed from me. An' then in a while there was bloody corpses a' streekit in their plaids; an' then—then I seed him that ye ken o', Mr. Tresham; an' his time 's no' long upon earth; for the winding-sheet was at his briest. An' there was another too, Glenvallich, an' one that ye wud na like to hear o'. But again it a' passed from me, an' the soughing o' the waves on the rocks and the beach died awa', and I shut my weary een; and when I opened them again I was in a lone glen, an' a wee burnie gurgling doon atween its green banks. An' I dinna ken how it cam' to my mind, but I kent it was this very place, where I hae sojourned so long; an' O it was sweet and lown, an' lonely—not a leeving thing was there, but one ould cretar, like mysel'; an' I watched

her as she sat wi' her back till a tree; an' I thought, who cud she be? an' my heart burned as I loked at her, for I thocht she was in grief, and I fain wud hae comforted her. But 'ore ever I cud wun near her, there was a soft sweet voice, that fell on my heart like the voice of a blessed speerit; and weel did I ken it, for it was the voice o' my own sweet child that's gone. An' the cretar lifted up her head and loked at me, and then I knew the truth—it was my ownsel—an' the dead close were upon me, and I kent that my time was at hand. An' a' grew dark again; and when next I found the sense come to me, I was lying just as ye see me; an' here hae I lain since syne, till ye cam' to the door; an' noo, young man, hear a dying woman's words; there's but one thing to mind. To Glen Shlichard ye most go; it's no' there ye'll find what ye're seekin', but it's there ye'll get the tidings. Keep ye aye till the wast—for there, in some o' thae wild lochs will ye find the wark that's to do. Mind, that the Almighty has made you, by me, the rods o' his vengeance, and the messengers o' his mercy; an' let not the hand that's at the plough turn back or halt. An' noo set on; an' the blessing of the ould an' the infirm go wi' you! It may be that we'll never meet again on this side o' the grave; and yet it's born in upon my heart that ye'll come back wi' joy, and that these ould ears will be blessed by the voice o' my darling bairn afore I go to my place an' am seen no more!"

With these words, the old woman, who during the time she was speaking had become animated to an extraordinary degree, sunk at once, as it seemed, into the most utter debility. To all their further questions she would only reply, "Ye have heard a'—ye have heard a'—awa', awa'!" When they asked her if she could tell the exact spot from whence she believed the cries to have issued, she told them that it must have been just on the brae face, where the path dipped into the glen; and satisfied they had received all the information she had to give, whatever might be the credit due to it, they took their leave and departed.

"Strange enough, indeed," said Glenvallich, as they left the house, "that on both our expeditions, Harry, although so different in their objects, we should start from the same point, and be guided by the same counsels—those of an old woman, and one scarcely to be termed sane! And yet, Tresham, it is a counsel I am strongly inclined to follow; because, independently of any real knowledge she may possess—however come by—her suggestions have probability on their side."

"I see they have; and a fearful probability they involve. And yet, Charles, pity or smile at my weakness as you will, I declare to you that the only comfort I can taste in this most torturing affair, is derived from the assurances of that old woman, wild or visionary as they may be. It is astonishing how often she hits upon the truth.

Her rhapsody of this morning, now, reminded me of her quite as extraordinary premonitory vision of the flood. The same singular mixture of minuteness and indistinctness—of extravagance and probability——”

“Well, if such is the effect of your belief, I certainly shall not endeavour to undermine it. But you hear she promises us a hard tussle for it, at all events.”

“I would it were come to that—would to God I had the dear girl but in view, were she surrounded by a dozen of your wildest ruffians!”

“Aye, my good fellow; but for her sake, as well as your own, don’t be rash. Remember, your prophetic Elsie talked something about *streekit corses*; and, by-the-bye, I am not quite comfortable myself about her allusion to my people. I would not be a fool, Harry, and I don’t like any more than you to expose myself to be laughed at; but is there not a strange sort of coincidence between her prophetic hints and the misgivings of Duncan Maccombich, after our brush in Glen Shlichard?”

“Aye, one might fancy so; but Elsie’s predictions are so vague—and we need not be putting ugly fancies into the poor fellow’s head.”

“O no; that would be doing our best to secure their fulfilment; and though I would be very averse to exposing him needlessly, we are not just to be frightened by an old woman’s fancies, and

leave our best hand behind on account of a bad dream. And faith, after all, we are giving too much importance to the matter in every way. However, Glen Shlichard is clearly our course, and the sooner we are there, the better—so let us begin our search, and take the road.”

Although the infirmity of old Elsie prevented her from describing exactly the spot from whence she imagined the cries to proceed, they still gathered enough to conclude that Miss Stewart must have been seized while actually descending into the little glen. Spreading, therefore, they commenced an examination of the ground at this point, and soon found the traces of a small-footed horse, which led through the underwood to an opening near the path. The mark of men's feet were also apparent; but the impressions were rendered incomplete by the moss and herbage. The fragment of a red shawl, which Tresham instantly recognized as one which his mistress had worn, hanging on a black-thorn bush, offered a more positive evidence that Miss Stewart had been there, as well as that force had been used in dragging her from the path. Following the hoof-tracks, which the moist ground retained, the party, carefully avoiding any course that might obliterate or confuse them, at length reached a little swamp, in which open spaces of peat-bog were intermingled with patches of marsh-willows, bog-myrtle, and dwarf-sauch. In this place the deep marks were still more distinctly

to be seen, and the impression of variously-sized shoes could also be made out. Even the nails of the heavy brogues which some of them wore, could be counted in the tenacious soil. But the fugitives appeared to have become sensible that such traces might lead to discovery, for some of them had been effaced, and the course of the animal had been turned all at once to the left, where it became lost among high heather and brushwood.

At this place Duncan Maccombich took the lead, and commenced the search with the earnestness and sagacity of a thoroughgoing deer-stalker. "Spread yeresels, lads, an' go canny here; dinna put a fut to the ground afore ye see what's under it—ye might spoil a track wi' one careless tramp o' your brogue. But I 'm thinking here 's something that 'ill show us the road as weel as if they had tould us it." And he lifted up a piece of birch twig, twisted into the fetter or hap-shackle with which Highland horses are commonly equipped, and which often is made to serve in place of a rod to drive them on. "See, they 've dropt their *coilteach*.* An' leuk, here 's the baist's fut-mark; they 'll have passed at the slap thonder—there 's a hard spot on the bit burnie, an' it 's soft abuve and below."

Duncan was right. The traces again became visible, and they tracked them across a piece of

* Woody.

bare muir, where several bridle paths led in as many different directions. It was probably chance more than even the sagacity of the forester, that led him to hit upon the right track here, for the innumerable marks of hoofs imprinted by all the cattle which grazed on the hill, made it impossible here to follow those of any particular animal. But Duncan had remarked that on one of the largest foot-prints a bit of the iron rim, which is often put upon the fore part of such heavy shoes, in addition to the large-headed nails, had been broken off, leaving the impression thus imperfect ; and he had said at the moment, "Here's a ken mark that we'll find them by, if we can only keep sight o' it." By chance then we say, the forester's eye fell upon this very shoe-print in a little bit of boggy soil bordering the gravelly road, and he declared himself satisfied of the way which the ruffians had taken ; "for they'll trust to the hard road now, an' straight their course," said he.

To prevent all chance of mistake, however, the party separated, and, observing nearly parallel directions, took their way towards a pass in the hill, some miles a-head, by which it seemed probable the fugitives must have gone, if they really had taken the road which the forester supposed. More than once was the same foot-print detected, but at length it disappeared altogether, to the alarm and disappointment of Tresham, who, more

sanguine than Glenvallich, and with a far deeper interest in the event, was more easily depressed by any discouraging occurrence.

“We’ll go on to the pass, any how,” said Duncan; “we’ll get a good leuk round us there, afore we go farther.” As they approached it, the forester’s eye caught sight of a little urchin sitting wrapped up in a grey plaid, on the top of a cairn of stones a quarter of a mile above them, like some bird of prey, watching their motions. Leaving the party, the forester advanced towards the creature, and addressing a few words of Gaelic to him, prevailed on him to descend from his altitudes. “Who can tell,” remarked he, “what this wee chield may have seen yestreen?—we canna go wrong in asking him.”

It was well they did, for the boy, encouraged by fair words and a little drop of whisky—no Highlander is young enough to refuse that—told them that as he was watching the sheep on the preceding afternoon—his daily occupation—an hour or two before dusk, he had seen four men leading a woman (he believed) on horseback along the road by which the party had come. The female seemed to be wrapped in a plaid, and the men had sticks or guns, or something of that sort in their hands. This was all he could tell about them; but on being asked what way they went, he said they had turned up the hill about a mile further on, and made straight for the pass of *Slochd-lea*.

“Then sure enough it’s Glen Shlichard they’re for,” said Duncan; “for that’s the straight road that’ll tak’ them down by the shouther o’ the Garru-vein.”

“Then all we have to do is to follow it, I suppose,” said Glenvallich: “there’s scarcely any use in spreading out more, I dare say.”

“Trowth, scarcely, sir. I dinna see where else they cud go, if it was na to turn off at the end o’ the black hill thonder, and strike richt across the country. But where wud that tak’ them, but till an opener bit than they have left? No, no, it’s to Glen Shlichard they’re off; but two of us may go up yon way, an’ see if any thing can be made out, an’ two may keep out on the left, an’ try if the shepherds, or them in the hill toons, have seen fouk passing—it wunna hinder us muckle.”

This arrangement was accordingly adopted, but the correctness of Duncan’s conclusion was indisputably proved by more than one occurrence on the road; for, in the first place, the remarkable foot-print was again frequently detected; and, after they had proceeded for several miles, a little shoe, which could have belonged to no one else than the missing lady, was found lying on the road.

“See till that noo,” said the forester, taking up the small and delicate appurtenance, and considering it with minute attention;—“there’s more sense and thocht—ay, and more stout-heartedness in that bonny young leddy than ye’ll find in many

a bearded man. She kent that if they catched her dropping any thing they wud understand her meaning and keep on their guard. So she's waited till the darkness cam' on, and then let fall the thing that wud be least missed, for those that cam' after her to tak' their lesson from!" The sight of this convincing proof of Isabelle's having so lately passed by, made Tresham wild: he eagerly thrust it in his bosom, and the whole of those that accompanied him pushed forward with all speed to the pass, where, after a short halt, they were joined by the rest of the party.

The weather turned out stormy and bad, and the day was far spent before, with all their speed, they could reach the shoulder of the Garru-vein, which looked into glen Shlichard. A council of war was then held, to decide upon the fittest course to be taken, and the best place for passing the night in, should no intelligence be gleaned before darkness should put an end to their search.

"It's a bad time to hunt these holes and corries, sir, when we ha'ena light to see the mark o' a baist's fut;" said Duncan, when he was consulted; "they might lie within ten yards o' us, an' we be none the wiser;—but surely they wunna have stopped any place here away till noo, if they had any farther to go; so how to keep track, or follow till daylight, I canna see."

"I don't know—why mayn't they take it in their heads to skulk here till they think pursuit may be

over?" said Tresham; "it's as likely a plan for them to follow as any other; and I wish they may think of it—we should search every hole and corner of the glen—you know them all, Maccombich."

"Aye, ow'r weel, sir, but they're no just cannie places to be groping about in, wi' a dark nicht ow'r us. We'll come far better speed wi' skriegh o' day the morn; and it's my thocht that we'll best go doon at once to the toon below us—that's Ballintruim—ye'll see the smoke thonder, just ow'r yon know. If the people there ken any thing about our business, I'll be sure to get it out o' them; for whatever they might try against the Excise lads, the never a soul o' them wud hurt or harm, or see harmed, even a *doug* belonging till an old respecket family in the country; an' them never troubling the people too."

"You forget, too, my good fellow," said Glenvallich to his friend, "that we have a news gatherer in the glen, whom we must try to fall in with, which we can never hope to do in the hill here; our only hope is in Ballintruim, where I would not be surprised to find him waiting us."

The force of these combined arguments was not to be questioned; so the whole party bent their steps down the hill, towards the village. On their arrival within sight of the straggling mass of black huts and peat-stacks which constituted the *toon* of Ballintruim, and which covered a little

green spot on the river side, the inhabitants of these humble abodes began to turn out and to gaze at the strangers. But there was in the aspect of the principal men something more than mere curiosity; there was bustle and expectation, if not actual symptoms of preparations, to be traced in their attitudes and demeanour. And so thought Maccombich, for as they approached the foremost group, and received their repeated "Failte-horu!" "I'm mista'en if thae fouk dinna expeck us, an' ken our errand too," said he.

"In that case, Maccombich, you can't too soon learn what they do know, and inform us of it; at all events we can rest here for some hours: we shall certainly start soon in the morning."

An old man with white flowing hair now came forward, followed by a female of most squalid and venerable appearance, with a face puckered by the smile, which contorted it into a labyrinth of wrinkles. Bottle and quaich in hand, these patriarchal figures proffered a dram to the gentlemen, and besought them in Gaelic to enter the yawning mouth of a most grim-looking chasm, which, like the dragon monster of yore, vomited forth volumes of smoke, if not of flames. It was a courtesy, under all circumstances, not to be rejected, so in they went, though at the hazard of suffocation from the cloud of acrid smoke which invaded their organs of respiration, and which curled in

dense blue masses through all the complicated sinuosities of the roof.

Glenvallich's acquaintance with the Gaelic language was insufficient for maintaining a conversation with the old man ; but he could understand from his allusions to the last visit of Macgillie-cullach to the glen, that he had been somewhat of a sufferer by it ; though his winks, and smiles, and knowing looks, seemed to intimate that the gentlemen might reckon upon a better welcome than they met with on that memorable occasion.

"Is this not a singular national trait, now, Tresham?" said he ; "surely it is not a bad account of these poor fellows' dispositions, that they thus receive in peace and good faith, and even with hearty welcome, the very men who, not two months ago, came with fire and sword to destroy their property. Their errors, after all, are those of ignorance and education ; and assuredly they don't bear malice, or you and I would scarcely be sitting here. We may trace in it a mixture of the old feelings of feudal dependence and submission, with the calm orderly habits and forgiving temper of the people ; and no bad amalgam they make in practice, we must acknowledge."

"Aye, I shall be very ready to acknowledge their merits at any other time ; but just at present, I am rather too anxious to do them full justice, perhaps. I would rather hear what may

possibly be gathered from them ; and here to my wish comes Duncan, with his face full of news. Let us hear what he has got." And certainly, even the imperfect light of the blazing peats sufficed to betray the uncommon agitation which was painted in the forester's countenance.

"It's weel for our errand we cam' this way the day, sir," said he, "for there's a lad out by that seed them in the glen this blessed morning. Aye, ye may start an' glour, but keep quait an' ye'll hear," said he to Tresham, who had, indeed, started from his seat with an exclamation of joyful surprise. "A wild nicht it was for the puir young leddy to be out in the hill, but it's a sure thing that travel wi' her a' nicht they did, an' I'm thinking they never halted till they got till the Aultrian this morning. The lad was out himsel' as sune as he cud see, an' he saw them passing over the Strone, on the very way to Aultrian. He did na' weel ken what to mak' o' them, for he was sensible that what was on the horse was no corn, but a body, tho' it was sore happit up; an' it was na' any o' the roads for bringin' in the stuff by. So he off through the wud, an' fairly *stalked* them; for the fouk of this glen, sir, they dinna like any one to come the way without their kenning o' it. He didna venture ow'r close, but keepit among the trees, aye cowering down where there was a bare bit, for fear they might get sight o' him;

an' may I never go out o' this, sir, but he says he's most sure and certain that it's thon same wild fellow that ye ken so weel o'—black Kenneth Dhoruv as *they* call him—dark Dougald Dorach as *I* ken him to be—that was leading the baist himsel', and some o' the wildest o' his comrades wi' him, so we ken what sort o' work we hae to do noo. But ye see, sir, the fouk here, like Kenneth, as ill as others do, for muckle evil and loss have they had at his hands; an' Kenneth kens as weel, that though there is not a better hiding-place in the country, it wudna be good for his health eenoo to be found in it, and trouth I'm 'most surprised to see him taking the way."

"Well, but what has become of them, then?" inquired Tresham, impatiently.

"Ou, ye see, sir, the lad had no call to do more than he did, an' it was just 'let be for let be' wi' him. So home he cam', an' tould what he had seen; an' it's no aboov' an hour an' a half past since Rob Macian, that your honour sent here afore ye cam' from home, cam' to the glen, from Breulach an' the braes, where he had been seeking news. Rob begood to ask whether there was any thing strange going on in the glen. 'No; no muckle since ye was here yeresel', was the answer; 'we're quait eneugh noo, an' ye had a good hand at making us so.' 'Weel, weel, Ewen, sorry was I to hurt you or yours; but ye ken

when the chief calls, the clan most follow. An' so there's nought strange.' 'No; an' we dinna' want any thing but to be let alone,' says Ewen, (that's the ould man here, Ewen Bain, sir;) 'but I'm misdoubtin' we'll no hae that good luck long.' 'No?' says Rob; 'an' who'll be for troubling ye?' 'Faith, that may be more than I can say; but if Macgillieculloch lets us be, there's thae black west country chaps—an evil hour to them!—will be bringing mischief on us again. They think get a futting in the glen, but by the black stone o' Inchkerrach they'll find it ow'r hot for their skins. There's the lad Ruary *Peik* says he seed black Kenneth this very mornin', wi' some more o' the same wild *kearnachs*, passed up by the Strone, an' they had a woman wi' them too, on a horse; great things she was, no doubt, to be in such company.' 'An' what becam' o' them?' asked Rob, opening his lugs no doubt when he heard this story; for I'se warrant he thocht there might be something more in the matter than Ewen kent o'. 'Ou, what div I know?' says Ewen; 'if they dinna meddle wi' me I'se no meddle wi' them; but if they think to come round us, an' mak' a houff o' the glen again, an' bring the wild gaugers an' Excise fouk on us again, haith he'll get what he'll maybe no like.'

"So, sir, Rob, it seems, when Ewen said so much, just tould him that his master had a thought some mischief was going on, no' in the

brewing line, but some other wickedness, by thae very chaps, an' that he was sent to watch them; for that Glenvallich kent weel an honest man like him wud rather len' a hand to help him than counter him in his duty, an' that he wud start off that meenat for Aultrian, an' try to get wind o' what was going on. 'An', says Rob, "if there's been any *creach*, or splore, or wild work at Air-druthmore, an' that they have come this way, ye needna wonder if ye should see my maister and his *tails* coming linking up the glen; but ye need na fear, he has no thocht after the stills this time, an' be ye ceevil, an' ye'll no hae to repent it.'—So Rob's off to Aultrian, sir; an' if he doesna find what he's seeking there, I dinna doubt but he'll try his luck at the other houff, at the Corru-eiran; and I dinna see, sir, what we can weel do till he's back, for if we were to start we might miss o' him, an' a' the news he has."

"Good God! how torturing!" exclaimed Tresham; "to know she may be so near, and yet forced to stay here idle, while they may at this very time be carrying her further from us. F'or God's sake, Charles, what do you say; don't you think we might make an attempt?"

"My dear Harry, believe me I feel all the cruelty of your situation, but I don't see what we can possibly do until morning, or Rob Macian returns. No doubt Maccombich could find the way to the Aultrian, but how do we know they

are there? and we might pass within a yard of them, without knowing it. I think unless Kenneth is alarmed, he'll hardly stir before daylight; he'll be careful in such roads, with such a charge as he has. Besides, remember all the people are not animated with a lover's ardour; they have had two hard days' work; a few hours' rest and a meal are absolutely necessary, if you expect them to *step out* to-morrow. Let me advise you to make an effort yourself for a few hours' sleep; just wrap yourself up in this plaid, and lay down on that bed there, black as it looks."

"My dear fellow, I could no more sleep just now than fly; take you the bed."

"Well, then, I will;"—and after a light meal on potatoes and milk, and oat bread, with a little whisky and water, Glenvallich settled himself to sleep, an example in which he was imitated by all his people.

It was still early in the night, and Tresham unable to take that rest which his jaded mind not less than his wearied body required, remained sitting upon the block of wood which he had occupied, looking into the dying embers, and endeavouring to suppress or endure, as best he could, the painful emotions of doubt and impatience, which rose with stifling violence in his breast. Few situations, indeed, can be conceived more painful than that in which he found himself placed for the time. To know that Isabelle, his

own sweet Isabelle—the betrothed wife of his bosom—snatched from him at the very instant when fortune had overthrown every impediment to their union—to know that this object of his fondest love was at that very time, perhaps within a few miles of him, in the power of ruffians, who might even then be dragging her off to part them for ever, while he with hands and eyes fettered, yet possessed of a sufficient force to rescue her, was forced to remain useless and inactive; it was too much to endure. In the feverish restlessness of his mind he would often start up, and rush forth into the open air, to allay for a moment the gnawing torment of his thoughts. Hour after hour passed on in this harassing mental conflict. No sound was around him but the ceaseless flow of the river, and the howling of the night wind, and the heavy breathings of his companions. The embers had ceased to emit light, even the gathering peat was smothered in the deep mass of its own ashes. Black darkness reigned through the dwelling, and at length, nature overpowered sunk under the struggle, and Tresham fell, half reclining against one of the rough couples of the wall, into a troubled slumber.

How long this had continued he knew not. If time were to be measured by the rapid and multitudinous flow of ideas, it must have been for a long period indeed, for numberless were the fantastic and feverish images which rushed through

his brain. At length he fancied himself striving to protect his mistress from the efforts of a wicked magician, who sought to carry her off. He was in a castle, on a rock, against which the seas beat and the winds blew; he thought a fierce storm was threatening to tear it from its foundations, while some superhuman force thundered at the gates, and in a terrible voice called aloud on him to surrender. Reality had so far mingled with the fictions of his brain, for the wind was loud, and the rain pelted heavily, while some one without did, in fact, beat stoutly at the door, and a voice in Gaelic, and in no gentle key, called out, *Bel-u-steh, Duine-emah?*—*Bel-u-steh?*—are ye in, gud man? are ye in?"

Starting from his feverish slumber, Tresham found others of the sleepers in the act of rousing themselves to answer the summons. The voice of Maccombich was first heard, exclaiming to himself in Gaelic, "*Diaoul!* if that's no' Rob?" and groping and stumbling to the door, he got it open, saying, "*Rob!—Rob Macian!*"—" *Bel-u-tu?*"—" *Peanuich-mi!*—bless me! Duncan Maccombich!—you here?—where's the laird?"

"In the house, with Mr. Tresham an' half a dozen more o' them. But come in, man; come in and gi' us your news. It's a coarse night."

By this time Tresham had recovered his recollection, and was trying not very effectually to rouse the smouldering fire; but the forester came

to his aid, and soon effected a blaze by adding to the gathering peat a little fresh turf, which readily caught the flame.

“And now for God’s sake let us hear what he has to say,” said Tresham. And the man, after giving a short account of all he had done before arriving at Ballintruim, continued as follows:

“Weel, sir, late as it was, an’ weel tired as I was mysel’, I thocht I cudna do less than be off to see after Kenneth an’ his squad. It’s a weary road to Aultrian, sir, and no very canny; so I tried to get Ruary *Peik* to go wi’ me, an’ help me to find out the way. But we had na gone a mile ’ore he got feart, and skulked in among the bushes, and left me. Weel, black dark almost it was ’ore ever I got to the fut o’ the burn, an’ a wild job I had climbing up to the bothy. But it was black an’ a’ black—de’il a thing was in it; no, nor had for eight days an’ more, for the ashes o’ the last peat fire were weet and cakit-like, an’ neither mark o’ man or baist there, for I struck a light, an’ kenilt a bit fir-canle to see wi’. Weel, I most lost heart at this, an’ I left the place, an’ was for coming back to the toon, when I heard something like the step o’ a fut on one side o’ me, an’ I stood and listened, an’ de’il ha’ me if I didna hear the tramp o’ a horse’s feet, an’ queer grumbling sounds as if some one was speakin’, that didna wish to be heard. So I just steppit a hint a bush, an’ waited, an’ sure enough, afore a meenat was gone,

there cam' three men wi' a horse, one leading it by a halter like, an' one on each side o' it, an' there was a something on the baist, but it was so weel wrappet up that I cudna say whether it was man or woman.

“Aye! thought I, can this be any thing my maister has business wi'?—an' I just thought to let be for let be, an' go my ways. But something grippit me in my heart, an' said, ‘may be—who can tell?—this is the very work ye're sent after.’ So, after a wee while swithering, I just made my mind up to follow them; an' awa' they went, an' a sore road for man or baist it was at night; an' muckle a do had I to keep them in sight, and yet not to be seen mysel'. An' a weary while it was afore they turned up the burn that comes down from from Kheim-na-mearlach—a black hole it is—and I was feared it was up the pass they were for, an' I didna ken what to do. But whether the baist or the burthen was tired, or whether it was the wild wind that cam' doon the pass, I canna tell. I'm thinking the garron made a stumble, for they halted an' turned off the road to a bit hollow, an' I seed them tak' the thing off the horse, an' carry it into a deep hole under the rock. I didna ken there was one—a calm loun place where neither wun nor rain cud come. I watched them there; an' after a while they lighted a bit wood and gathered some sticks, an' made a fire. An' then I saw one o' the men that was

there tak' a haud o' the body that was on the horse, and tak' off a great beg plaid that was round the head o' it, an' it began to sigh and to groan, an' to put its hands to the fire—an' O ! they were sma' white hands, and I leuked and leuked, an' the licht glinted on the face, an' I seed that it was a woman. Ochone ! never will I forget it—may I never do good, Mr. Tresham ! if it wasna the face o' Miss Isabelle Stewart Airdruthmore !—an' the villain by her side was just yon wild Kenneth Dhoruv that we had the straemash wi' here two months since syne."

We need not dwell upon the various emotions with which Tresham listened to this long narrative, and its momentous close—so perfect a confirmation of the correctness of all their conclusions. "And what did ye do, man?" demanded he at last, after several interruptions, which burst from him in spite of himself. "Did ye leave her there? Could ye do nothing to help her—made ye no attempt?"

"Ou, sir, what was I to do against four weel-armed stout chields, wi' muskets and claymores an' a' ? I watched and watched, in hopes they might go to sleep, and then may be I might get close to the puir leddy, an' gie her a word o' comfort ; for I was quite dumbfounded to see one like her in such a place, and in such hands. But still as I watched, they watched too, and no' hope o' better ; so I thought I wud just come back to the toon an'

get help, an' see an' tak' her out o' their hands ; an' if no, at least to see whare they were for carrying her to. But there's eneugh o' us noo, and bad as the nicht is, an' weary as I am, I'm ready to bring you till the bit where they are."

" My good fellow," said Tresham, warmly, " your zeal shan't want its reward. Maccombich, this is all we wanted ; surely we should lose no more time. Let us call Glenvallich and the men."

" Aye, aye, sir, no doubt, an' I'll see about the men—ye'll best call Glenvallich yoursel'."—And Duncan left the hut to proceed to the other dormitories, while Tresham summoned his friend.

" Aye, now indeed we may do something ;—now I do trust we have something like ground to go upon," said Glenvallich, when made acquainted with the information brought by his servant. " Let us lose no more time—faith, we have none to spare, for it's just on four o'clock. Come, let us out—where's Duncan and the men ?" The men were fast mustering, but as yet Duncan came not. After a considerable pause of doubt, however, a figure was seen slowly approaching from the river side. It was Duncan, but with sadly altered cheer. To his comrades, who asked where he had been, he answered never a word ; and to the impatient appeals of Tresham he was equally mute. Even when his master, astonished and annoyed at an apathy so ill befitting the time, de-

manded with some sharpness "what could be the matter," Duncan would give no explanation : with an obvious effort he shook off the numbing influence as one would a painful weight, and assuming a tone of cheerfulness, only replied—"Nothing, sir—nothing."

But when the arrangements for proceeding were complete, and the men were hastily taking a little refreshment, to compensate for their curtailed rest, and fit them for the duty that was before them, the forester drew his master aside, and addressed him thus in accents of extreme gravity. "It's now two months, sir, as ye may weel mind, since I followed you into this glen ; an' may be ye may mind too, what happened to me yon day. That very nicht, I tould your honour that Black Kenneth Dhoruv and me wud meet 'ore three months were ow'r, an' that come what might to others, it wud be the last o' Duncan Maccombich. That time has now come ; an' mark my words, sir,—afore twal' hours are past that man and me 'ill meet, an' ere the nicht be ow'r, Maccombich will be a stark and streekit corpse."

"Good heavens, Duncan !" exclaimed Glenvallich, shuddering no less at the man's solemnity than at the painful accordance of his presentiments with Elsie's predictions. "Are your wits gone, man, that you talk so? You, a brave man, as I well know you to be?—If you fear, or dislike going

on with us, remain—go back—I'll excuse you, and make your excuse to Mr. Tresham; but don't give way to such fancies."

"No, your honour," replied the forester, calmly but impressively, "I'm neither a coward nor an ungrateful scoundrel, nor am I mad. I would not for my life turn back; but as sure as the sun will rise to-day it will be wi' me as I say."

"Nonsense, man!—ye're fatigued, or low-spirited—take a dram, man, and get over it. But what the deuce reason have you for such a supposition?"

"Ye wud na believe me, sir, if I tould you; an' there's no use in getting mysel' laughed at."

"I assure you, Maccombich, I am in no laughing humour; I would very fain try to reason you out of this fancy, but laugh at you I will not; as to believing you, that must depend on what it is you have to tell—you may be under a delusion."

"Weel, sir, call it what you like, it mak's little odds to me, for what I seed this morning—no' an hour syne,—was never seen by mortal man that leaved after it four-and-twenty hours."

"Well, but what was it, then?"

"I went, sir, to put up the lads, just when Mr. Tresham wakened your honour. When I had been at the last bothy, the fancy tuke me—I canna tell why—to go doun to the river side. The wun was loun and low at the time, an' the sound o' the water, so sweet and murnful-like, minded me o' bonny Glen

Orra ; and the thocht o' the days that I once seed there, an' o' sweet May Macivor, cam' ow'r me on a sudden like a souch o' the warm summer wind, an' my heart just melted within me like, and I felt as if I wud choke ; and I was standing this way by the river side, when I seed a figure afore me on the bank. I cudna tell whare he cam' from, but I thocht it was one o' the lads come to call me, and I made a step towards him ; an' as I moved it moved ; an' when I stopped, it stopt. But still I got nearer an' nearer, an' I saw that it was a man in a dress like my own, wi' a grey plaid ow'r his shouthers ; an' I called out till him to halt and tell who he was, an' he lifted up his head, your honour, an' then I saw that it was *myself*."

Spite of sense and philosophy, Glenvallich could not help shuddering as the forester, in slow, earnest, searching tones, described this phantom of his own diseased imagination. In vain did he attempt to explain the phenomenon to poor Duncan upon natural principles. The impression was too deeply fixed to be erased—"No, no, your honour—ye wunna find me lag behind, or fight the worse for this—if fighting there is to be ; but as for me, it's all over. However it may come, whatever be the means, my hour is at hand, an' that ye'll have proof of afore the day's done." It was like the former affair in Glen Shlichard—persuasions, reasonings, tauntings, were alike unavailing to combat the superstitious forebodings of the poor forester, and

Glenvallich, mortified and distressed, was forced to give up the point.

To have mentioned the circumstance to Tresham would have been equally useless and cruel; the expedition was not to be arrested in its progress on account of a visionary fantasy, the creature of a superstitious brain; and why then add to an uneasiness already sufficiently painful? Glenvallich took the generous part, buried the unpleasing impressions in his own bosom, and roused his energies to the impending struggle.

CHAPTER XII.

PURSUIT CONTINUED.

Throw your plaids—draw your blades,
Pioprach of Connil Dhue, sound for the onset.

IN a few minutes more, the whole party were once more in motion under the guidance of Rob Macian, who had been renovated by a dram and some refreshment, and all pushed forward for the hollow at the foot of Kheim-na-mearlach. So painful was the way, and so dark the morning, that the grey dawn had begun to break before they turned up the hollow that led to the pass. “Are ye sure of your ground now, Macian?” half-whispered Glenvallich, as the guide cast a keen searching glance around him. “If you have any doubts, let us halt till you satisfy yourself.”

“There’s no mistake, sir,” replied Macian, in the same tone; “there can be none, for this is the only road—a bad steep step it is; an’ for the hollow, it’s no’ a quarter o’ a mile from

the bit we're in. I mind that last turn weel, an' there was an ould stump o' a birch tree, on a bit rock on the side o' the road, just fornent it."

"Was it any thing like thon?" asked the forester, whose keen optics seemed to pierce better through the dull atmosphere than those of others.

"The very same," said Rob; I cud swear to the crook in thon branch, noo that a body can see it."

"Then weel div' I ken the place, an' often has it sheltered a precious cargo o' good stuff afore noo; but the quaiter we keep een noo the better—whisht, lads—whisht, an' be ready."

With cautious steps and in-held breath they now advanced, Tresham and Glenvallich following close upon the heels of Macian and the forester;—but they were doomed to a bitter disappointment. When they turned the corner of the rock which concealed the hollow, the doubts of all became awakened, not less by the extreme darkness, than by the utter silence which reigned within. "Watch the entrance well now, boys, while we strike a light," whispered Glenvallich, as this necessary operation was performed by Maccombich. But the first blaze was sufficient—there, indeed, were the embers of the recent fire, proving the correctness of the scout's report; but the nest was cold—the birds were flown, and the hopes of the friends were blighted.

It was with difficulty that Tresham could re-

strain within moderate bounds the distress and chagrin which this disappointment occasioned. His half-smothered, passionate exclamations, excited the sympathy of the forester, who encouraged him, as best he could, still to persevere, and to hope for success.

“ They’re surely up the pass, there’s no other way they cud go: they’re ow’r the Kheim-namearlach, an’ the road terrible bad; I wudna say but we may catch them yet afore they’re through the hill to Glen Altree.”

“ But is there no chance, think you, Maccom-bich, that the fellow may have made for some other lurking-place in this same glen?—he might do this, if he thinks he is followed, if it were only to throw us off the scent?”

“ I dinna think it, sir—he kens the bad welcome he wud find in the glen, an’ I’se warrant he wudna like to trust his ill-gotten prize within their bounds—he kens they wud be for having it out o’ his grip. No, no, sir, depend upon it he’s up the pass wi’ her: he seeks to get the puir leddy down to the loch-side—to some o’ their hidies there, that are less kent o’ than them in Glen Shlichard.”

“ Well—it’s very likely—I know there’s a pass out of this glen into Glen Altree, and down to the loch:—how far may it be to *Kean-Loch-Mouneard?*”

“ Ou trouth it’s a long way, sir—more than twuntty miles from the bit we’re in;—but I’m no

thinking they'll tak' the Kean-Loch-Mouneard road, they'll land down about Inch-Grattan, or the black Mull-o'-Borda—it's there they'll think o' hiding, I'se warrant."

"And the distance?"

"'Haith it's a gay bitty faither nor Kean-Loch-Mouneard:—it's good five-an'-twunty miles."

"Upon my soul, it's but blind work; but I see nothing for it but to push on—what say *you*, Tresham?"

"Why, my dear Charles, as for me, I have sworn, and I will keep my oath, to seek Isabelle till I find her. It is a heavy tax to lay upon your friendship, but I am sure that to doubt your will to go on, would affront that as much as manhood and steadiness; we may be wrong, but we have nothing for it but to try—I am clear for the sea-coast. My only fear is, lest these villains reach it before us: I feel assured that Maccombich is right."

"Well, then, let us push on without loss of time."

They continued their route accordingly, ascending by a path that wound along a dark chasm, in which roared a torrent, swelled by the winter rains, yet seldom in sight. It was a pass that well deserved its name;* for the numerous hollows and sinuosities in the rocks appeared eminently calculated for the resort of thieves and catherans.

* The pass of the Thief.

It was a toilsome and a dangerous defile, and Tresham could not help shuddering frequently, as the narrow and uncertain path wound among stunted birch, grey fragments of rock, and brown heather tufts, upon the very verge of the sheer precipice, or turned abruptly round the corner of some rock which projected over the stream, when he thought, "Along this dangerous and fearful track has Isabelle Stewart been dragged within these few hours past by callous-hearted desperate ruffians! Good God! what may not have happened! Is it possible that she can have passed through all this in safety? Dear, dear Isabelle!" But how was his terror and distress increased, when, after a sharp and difficult pull, they reached the summit of the long and tortuous pass.

They stood upon a ridge of rock, so sharp and narrow, that scarcely might a man find footing to walk along its crest. At either end of this neck arose a huge spire of dark grey rock, sparsely striped with a tawny green: their tops were concealed in the curling vapours—and beneath their feet yawned a grim dusky basin, the bottom of which was but silently discernible through the misty atmosphere, and which served to collect the numerous rills that poured from the cliffs around, ere they united into one torrent, and bounded into the ravine beyond it.

"Good God!—they can never have come this way," said Tresham, passionately; "Highland

garron itself could never keep its feet down this precipice."

"Aye, an' many a bra' whisky anker on its back forbye," said Duncan, with a smile almost as grim as the scene itself—"an' I'll wager something that afore ye're half a mile travelled, ye'll have proof o' it."

To active, willing men, the dangers, which were sufficiently calculated to alarm a lover's mind for the safety of his mistress, were but trifles, easily overstept, and in a few minutes the party had gained the soft but irregular bottom of the hollow below. Where the surface was stony or gravelly, the beaten track was easily discernible; but there were peat bogs and haggly bits where no regular path could be preserved, and where every traveller made his way as best he could.

"Just wait a bit here," said the forester, "till Kenny an' me try if there's any fresh tracks in the moss."

A few anxious minutes were now spent in examining all the open spots which intervened, sometimes to a considerable extent, between the heather hags; but the search seemed likely to be vain; indeed, in so wide an extent of difficult and frequently trodden ground, it appeared almost extravagant to hope that any particular track could be detected.

But the forester knew the ground. There were in reality but few points where a horse could

pass the bog, without risk of being “stabled” to some purpose, and to these points alone did Maccombich confine his attention.

At length Tresham saw the anxious gaze which had been directed towards the earth give way to a gleam of joy, as Duncan arose from his stooping posture.

“See to this, sir, and trust me again,” said he.

Tresham looked, but looked in vain, for all he could discover was a series of deep irregular hollows, as if an animal had been floundering through the half solid mud.

“I see what you mean, Maccombich; but how are we to know that this is the trace of the animal we are looking for?”

“Leuk again, sir, ye dinna see all yet—see to that,” and he pointed to the print of a very small shoe, which Tresham instantly recognised as that of a female.

“It is hers, by Heaven!—Maccombich, you are worth your weight in gold, man—and I shall not forget you for this. But how comes that single foot-print to be here by itself?”

“Ou, I’ll tell you that, sir:—ye see the baist fell into the bog, and they had to lift her off—ye can see their own traces aside the horse’s—an’ the leddie’s feet ’ill have taken the ground as she came doun. But what lad’s this? may be he can tell us more about the matter;” and Tresham and the rest casting their eyes in the direction which those

of the forester had taken, saw a single person ascending the hill from the ravine below.

“Better let one or two of the lads go forward and get hold of him,” said Glenvallich, “he may be alarmed at our numbers, and try to get off.”

“No fear, sir,” replied Maccombich, we have the hill on him, he cudna weel get awa’ if he wanted it, but he does na:—we may as weel step forward and meet him tho’.”

The stranger proved to be a lad of about sixteen years of age, lightly clad in the Highland fashion, who casting a curious glance at the advancing party, drew his plaid close across his chest, and leaning in a picturesque attitude upon his staff awaited their approach.

“*Failte, gui!*” * was his Gaelic salutation, as the party drew nigh.

“*Failte gouft-haine, ma gillie mah!* †” was the response of the forester, for the company.

“Are any o’ you Airdruthmore’s men?” pursued the youth, still speaking in his native language, or will there be any o’ Macgilliecullach’s lads among you?”

“An’ where would Macgilliecullach’s lads be, but where he is himsel’?” responded the forester in the same tongue; “and for Airdruthmore, if it’s no Bran, it’s Bran’s brother—there’s the young

* Hail! or welcome to you!

† Welcome yourself, my good lad.

sassenach that's aye wi' the ould laird—God bless him !”

“ Weel, then,” said the boy, taking off his bonnet in salute to the gentlemen—“ my errand is to them, and it's this:—If they wud find the bonnie lamb that's lost, they must follow fast on the fox's track, for if once he gets her to his hole, they'll see no more of her.”

“ And who is the fox?—and where is his hole, and who will guide us to it, *ma gilliemah* ?” inquired the forester.

“ Them that sent me here bade me say that the fox, is him ye ken o'—and the guide is him that brings the word ; and for the hole, there's a friend watching it that wunna sleep, an' wud do better still, but he is alone, and they are many :—he is weak and they are strong.”

“ And what say you to it, yourself, Duncan ?” asked Glenvallich, when informed of that which we have translated for the benefit of our readers. “ Do ye know any thing of this youngster ? or think you we should trust to him ?”

“ I know nothing of the lad, but he seems to ken our business, an' I canna see what cause he can have to cheat us.”

“ I have seen the lad afore, sir,” said one of the men, coming forward, “ he's sister's son to Eachan Mac Ewan's mother, and he follows Eachan.”

“ And who may Eachan Mac Ewan be ?”

“ Ou, sir, Eachan Mac Ewan's a lad from

Cladich, eastby; no' a bad chield was Eachan, but they're saying he has been ow'r muckle wi' the Glen Shlichard men of late. He was wi' black Kenneth thon day, when we cam' up wi' the lads in the burns o' the Garru-glaikan."

"That does not sound well," said Glenvallich. "If he has been intimate with black Kenneth, he is likely to prove but a slippery friend to us."

"I don't know that, Charles," said Tresham, "a deserter from the enemy's camp is often no bad ally."

"Aye, if he be deserter—but suppose him a spy—a spy sent to mislead us. Let us look a little closer into the matter at all events, before we trust to such a guide."

The forester was now set to cross-question the lad; but little more than he had at first declared, was to be elicited from him, nor did he appear to be in possession of more. His replies were uniform and consistent, but he either could not or would not tell whose he was, or who was the friend that had so unexpectedly and opportunely stepped forward to their aid. They questioned him closely regarding the direction in which he had been desired to lead the party, and his replies induced the forester to conclude that it was towards the same point he himself had decided upon making for.

"There's no saying, sir," said Maccombich,

“but I canna help believing, that some o’ this black rascal’s men are weary of his wicked ways and unprofitable villainy, an’ that he knows no-thing o’ this chield’s coming till us. It’s no’ likely that Kenneth wud seek to trap us intill a snare; he wud rather get clean off, I’m thinking, wi’ his prize, than have to do wi’ us at whatever advantage.”

“Aye, but if he wishes to throw us off the scent, he might take this way to mislead us, and to get off himself in the mean time.”

“He wud have tried that game afore this, sir, an’ no’ when we’re just at his tail. But trouth, sir, I dinna ken weel whare we wud go, but where he’s sayin’—blindlin’s as we are.”

“We have little else for it, I fear,” said Tresham. “I own I should be for following the lad—Maccombich knows the ground, and can form a guess whether the guide is playing us fair or foul; they are certainly on before us.”

“Well, I have no better plan to suggest, certainly,” said Glenvallich, “though I confess I am not without my doubts—but we must trust something to chance, and to our own sagacity and observation. Duncan, tell the boy we shall follow him, but warn him as he values his life, to beware of treachery.” The lad made urgent protestations of fidelity; in truth, he appeared to be altogether ignorant of the object of their quest, and wore so

open and natural an air of innocence and simplicity, that even Glenvallich's suspicions were weakened.

Thus circumstanced, the whole party resumed their way, threading the intricate windings of the dell, or glaik, below, until crossing the water, they ascended high upon the opposite range of mountains. "Thon water runs doon the way o' Kean-Loch-Mouneard," said Duncan, when consulted regarding this apparent deviation from the natural direction. "We must keep to the right, to come doon upon the Mull o' Borda; it's just the way I wud have taken mysel', an' we'll need to step out weel to reach it afore dark."

Accordingly they did step out; and hill and valley, muir and moss, and brae face was traversed in a tiresome succession, with which we shall not perplex the reader. The day was well advanced, as, after slanting for a long way down the shoulder of a very lofty hill, they turned a point, and saw beneath them a hollow of profound depth surrounded by black and scowling mountains, of shapes even yet more picturesque, and far more abrupt in their declivities, than those with which Tresham had hitherto been acquainted; while at their feet, in the dim indistinctness of a surly February afternoon, rolled a grim and dismal looking water, following their receding sinuosities, until lost behind their projecting shoulders. The unusual colour of its greenish waves as they

crisped, and curled, and broke under the action of a sharp breeze, sufficiently proclaimed this water to belong to the ocean, and the forester's words confirmed the fact. "Thon's Loch Mouneard," said he, as they stood for a moment gazing on the wild but sublime spectacle that lay beneath them—for a confused mass of towering hills, floating clouds, and distant water, pressed upon the aching vision, wheresoever the eye turned itself. "And whither now," asked Tresham impatiently, as the pause appeared to his anxious mind, unnecessarily prolonged. "This way your honor," was the brief reply as the forester and the boy strode forward down the hill.

A further and rapid descent now brought them to the lower regions of the hills; but the lad still avoided the paths which led to the water's edge; and they soon reached a point from which they enjoyed a more perfect, though still partial view of the loch and of its shores. The breadth of water at this point might be somewhat over two miles. The opposite shore was formed of very precipitous mountains, the breasts of which exhibited a variety of tints, blended into dreary harmony by the lowering tone of the sky and the dense haze of the season. Farther down, the loch became contracted, and a headland of no great height, but of a singular form, ran out from the side on which they were, almost half way across the channel. "Yon's the Mull o' Borda," said

Duncan, “ an’ faith, if I’m no’ mista’en, there’s a veshall in the cove thonder, that has little to do wi’ his Majesty’s customs. ’Haith, I’m thinking, we’re only just in time; I wud push on—they we’re after wunna be far from where thon boat’s lying.” And the eyes of the forester, who, in the interest and excitement of the pursuit, appeared to have forgotten his gloomy presentiments, now sparkled with all their wonted eagerness.

While yet they stood gazing at these localities, hesitating too, doubtless, as to the next steps to be taken, the figure of a man was observed, among the stones with which the declivity of the hill was covered, hastily and vigorously ascending to the point where they stood.

“ *Eh kew shin-eh!*—See—there’s himsel’!” said the guide, directing their attention to this person, who was obviously making every exertion to approach them;—“ that’s him that sent me.”

In a few minutes he reached the place where they stood; and then Tresham recognized in him the same young man whom he had seen in the Slochd-uaine, on his first memorable visit there, and who had interfered in his favour, during his short rencounter with black Kenneth, in the Garrulaikan. “ For God’s sake, what are your tidings?” exclaimed Tresham with eagerness, so soon as the man arrived within hail; “ are you here as friend or foe?”

“ As a friend,” replied Eachan in English, but

instantly substituting his native Gaelic, he added with eager rapidity, - “ye’re surely after the daughter of Airdruthmore, and if ye wish to save her, ye must na stand glowring there, but gar the stout arm help the willing heart, put the best fut foremost, an’ to the work. She’s this blessed moment in a bothy, doun by in the cove yonder; but the lugger’s come in a day sooner than was expeckit, an’ if the leddy’s no’ out afore the tide rises, she’ll be off an’ awa’ to Holland, an’ no more o’ her will ye ever see.”

“Good God! then why delay a moment?” exclaimed Tresham; “we’re all ready.”

“Stay Tresham, let us know at least what we have to do, before we start—and in the first place, pray how comes it, my friend, that you, an ally of Kenneth Dhoruv, should be found plotting against your comrade? how are we to trust to your guidance, or your tale?” The young man blushed—hesitated—coloured deeply; then entreating the two gentlemen and Maccombich to go apart with him for a little, he spoke to them as follows:—

“There’s no time for nonsense now; I have long been courting dark-eyed Mary, the daughter of black Kenneth; it’s that that made me follow him so long. He was weel contented wi’ me for a while, but since that very day when ye beset him in Glen Shlichard, Kenneth’s no’ been himsel’. He curses and abuses his daughter and mysel’, and swears we seek his ruin, and that he’ll be our

deaths. I wudna muckle mind his anger at mysel' maybe, but the puir lassie's in his hands, an' it's only two days since I heard for certain that he has promised Mary to that scoundrel Patterson, for his help in carrying off Airdruthmore's daughter. And it's to Holland that he'll carry her and Mary both, for Kenneth will never come back to Scotland—the country wunna bide him longer. This news put me mad—but the leddie was taken off afore I heard o' it, and I followed him, thinking to stop him some way, till her friends should follow, and then maybe they might take Mary out of his hands as weel as Airdruthmore's daughter; for Mary, puir thing, she loves me weel, an' terribly frightened she is for her wild father. And readily wud she leave him to come an' follow me. So I sent this boy to see if his friends were after her, and to show them the way, but I discharged him for telling who sent him; for I was feared ye wud think a follower of black Kenneth's cudna be without an evil design towards you, and that therefore ye wudna follow him; this is the truth, an' I'm ready to swear to it, and if I'm a villain or a liar, I'm in your hands to do as ye like wi' me."

But the doubts both of Tresham and Glenvallich had been removed by the internal evidence of truth which the young man's statement contained, and the forester remarked, "that Black Kenneth was such a villain, that he shudna wonder if he

murdered his daughter as he had done others afore her;" and the sigh which breathed from Maccombich's lips as he spoke, proved sufficiently whither his thoughts had flown at the moment.

"But what force may black Kenneth have within?" inquired Glenvallich.

"I canna just say what men there may be in the veshall, sir," said Eachan, "but there used na to be aboove a dozen or fifteen; an' I'm thinking they'll be more for taking care o' themselves than meddling wi' you, if ye'll only let them be—an' for Kenneth, he has na passing five lads wi' himsel'.—Ou, they'll never stand afore you, sir."

"By my word! but these are heavy odds though," said Glenvallich, musing; "we must venture it, I believe, nevertheless?"

"Certainly," said Tresham, firmly; "besides, fighting is not these fellows' trade—they don't love it; and I dare say, if we don't meddle with their stuff they won't interfere in the fray; but how are we to get at them?"

"Ou, there's a way that I'll show you, that 'ill tak' you right down behind the bothy itsel'. They'll be landing the goods e'en now, and maybe we'll get her off'ore the rest ken a word about it."

The business now assumed a serious shape: a short consultation was held to determine how to make the most of their own means and force. Glenvallich said a few words to his people, and Tresham was neither sparing of exhortations or pro-

mises of reward to those who should acquit themselves like men. In a few minutes every one had got his orders, and the party moved onwards to the scene of action. The forester, now excited to the utmost, like the war-horse who snuffs the battle from afar, took the lead, as was his wont, immediately behind the two gentlemen, the rest followed, and guided by Eachan, proceeded down the hill.

Having reached the promontory, or mull, they entered a ravine, which, as Eachan informed them, debouched behind the hut, and which served perfectly to shelter them from the view of all who were in the cove. When they had in this manner attained a pretty close vicinity to the place, Eachan with the two gentlemen and Duncan, went forward to make their observations. Creeping forward with the same stealthy caution as if they had been stalking deer, they reached a ledge of rock, over which they leaned, and saw beneath, but still at a considerable distance, the crew of the lugger busily engaged in unloading the vessel, which was almost high and dry, of a number of casks and packages which they carried up the beach, and bestowed, as it seemed, in various holes and hollows in the face of the rock. "Are there any of the men in the hut itself?" said Glenvallich.

"I can't tell that," replied Eachan, "but I'm sure that Airdruthmore's daughter, and my poor Mary, are there."

“Then, Charles,” said Tresham, whose impatience was becoming uncontrollable, “my voice is for making a rush at once upon the hut—breaking it open and seizing upon Isabelle—if once we get hold of her, the game is in our own hands—you’ll see they won’t attempt to molest us; the fellows, daring though they may be, won’t back the black ruffian against persons of our appearance; at all events, the surprise will do wonders; an enemy surprised is always more than half beaten. We should do it at once too, before the lads cool—they need not know that there’s a few more of them than of us—it would only be discouraging them uselessly—what say you?”

I believe it may be our best chance, though a desperate one it is: confoundedly unlucky that the lugger should be here. Negotiation would be useless—and at all events we should negotiate to better advantage after a successful brush. Let you and I, Tresham, with Eachan here, dash in for the hut. Duncan and the rest must show face to those without, and defend our rear.”

“Agreed—and now for it.”

Creeping back to their men, they explained in a few words what was to be done, and receiving from them a unanimous assurance of determination and devotion, they marched silently down the ravine. The hut was a little black shealing, formed of stones, wrecked wood and heather turf, sheltered on three sides by the formation of the place in

which it stood, but the door unfortunately opened towards the sea, and there was no other mode of entrance. Thus when they had reached the rear of the bothy under cover, there was nothing for it but to make a sudden rush round to the door, in full view of all the lugger's people, as they were busily at work landing her cargo. Accordingly, repeating their orders to Maccombich, to cover their rear with the bulk of the party when they should have entered, they formed in two divisions, and mustering their breath for the struggle, passed rapidly round, and Tresham and Glenvallich, with their fowling-pieces in their hands, and pistols in their belts, made at once for the door of the hut. Unfortunately, just as they executed this movement, a large fierce dog, which had already growled repeatedly, flew furiously out, barking loudly enough to have alarmed the seven sleepers themselves had they been there. "To the devil with the dog!" exclaimed one of the men, and aiming a heavy blow at the animal, he sent it sprawling and sorely wounded to a distance. But the mischief was already done. Two men who sat within the door, roused by the alarm, started up and faced the two friends as they reached the entrance, while those of the crew who were nearest, seized such arms as came to hand, and ran to repel what they doubtless conceived to be an attack of their enemies the Excise."

"Stand your ground, Maccombich, and leave

us alone to deal with these," shouted Glenvallich. "Now my lads," continued he, addressing the two guards, "all we want is the lady, and her we will have—give place and no one will molest you or any thing you have."

"Bl—st your eyes, keep off and be d—d to you!—keep off, will you, if you don't want a bullet through your guts—what, you won't? then d—n you, take it!" his pistol was rapidly levelled, but the muzzle struck up by Eachan's cudgel, sent its contents harmlessly into the air, while a blow from the butt of Glenvallich's rifle brought the fellow senseless to the ground. Tresham, still more eager, had not waited the assault, but running in upon the ruffian opposed to him, threw his whole weight upon the man, while in the act of drawing his pistol. The shock bore him to the ground, and rushing past him, the young Englishman broke into the interior of the hut.

"Isabelle! dearest Isabelle!" he cried, "we are here—you are saved!" In the dark atmosphere of the place, he could but just distinguish two figures whom he took to be females—but the shriek of joy which burst from one of them, was uttered in a voice which was not to be mistaken—and in another moment the plaided and muffled form of Isabelle Stewart was in his arms!"

In the meantime the combat raged hot and fierce without. Among the first to catch the alarm, and to run to oppose the invaders, was

black Kenneth himself. He had not yet laid his arms aside, and catching up his formidable broadsword, he rushed towards the hut. "Keep off!—keep off—I bid ye!" roared Maccombich, bringing his musket to the recover as they came on. "Let us alone and we'll no' trouble you; we only want the leddy, an' her we will have, if it cost us our heart's blood!"

On hearing these words, the crew of the smuggler seemed disposed to parley; "By the soul of my father, but ye'll catch it this time, if ye are for that work," ejaculated Kenneth, grinding his teeth with rage; "on lads, on—better lose the lugger than lose what's in that bothy—she's worth her weight in gold to you, men;—on—and send these chaps to the devil!"

"At your peril, then," shouted Maccombich; "you, Paterson, ye ken me—it 'ill no' be bairns' play this—think lad—there's maybe as muckle gold on this side as on yon, and some hard blows too, if ye dinna mind—so keep the lads off."

There was a momentary pause, and a murmur like the silent muttering of the thunder-cloud before it bursts; but the demon of mischief was abroad. Black Kenneth stormed, upbraided, and promised; and Paterson roared and taunted them in Dutch—they rallied, closed, and advanced.

"On them, boys!—cleave the skulls of the bloody excisemen!" thundered Kenneth; and

whirling his sword over his head, he sprung towards the forester.

“Thannumundiaoul, take it then,” muttered Duncan, as he fired his piece at his adversary. “Stand fast, lads, an’ give it to them—mind who ye’re fechtin’ for.”

But the ball of Duncan seemed for once to have missed its aim; for Kenneth never halted nor stayed till within sword’s length of the forester, whom he attacked with the fellest fury, almost before he was prepared to receive the assault. Clubbing his gun, however, Duncan defended himself with so much agility, that no stroke of his antagonist could take fatal effect; and by some unlucky twist, his sword coming in contact with the heavy butt, snapped right at the hilt, leaving the smuggler unarmed, and at the mercy of his opponent. But it seemed as if the triumph of courage and address was ever to be frustrated in poor Maccombich’s case, by the paralyzing spell of superstitious weakness, and that the hour of victory was doomed to be also that of danger. At this critical moment, Tresham ran out of the hut, bearing Isabelle in his arms, and followed almost mechanically by Mary, the daughter of Kenneth Dhoruv. But as she rushed from the door, bewildered with terror and confusion, her eyes fell upon the person of her father, already bleeding, and threatened by the forester’s uplifted weapon.

Filial duty, if not affection, was roused, and once more she rushed between the combatants, throwing her arms around her father, and calling aloud for "mercy ! mercy !" The effect upon the forester was instantaneous : dropping his weapon, he struck his hands upon his forehead. " God of heaven ! it's her, and for the *third time* !" he exclaimed " O May, May ! it was for you only I wished to live, an' for you I'm content to die !"

" Die, then, fool and coward ! it's what you're long been working for !" uttered Kenneth Dhoruv, in a voice hoarse with wrath, as, shaking his daughter from her hold, and drawing a pistol from his belt, he fired at the forester with deliberate aim.—With one convulsive shriek, the unfortunate Maccombich sprang into the air, and dropped at the feet of his murderer.

But the murder remained not long unavenged. The fierceness of the conflict between these two champions, together with the singular and touching incident which proved so fatal to poor Maccombich, had occasioned a partial suspension of the general action, and many of the combatants stood motionless gazing on the principal actors in the scene. But when Kenny, the under keeper, who stood close by the forester, saw the unexpected fate of his comrade, and the cold-blooded atrocity with which the deed was perpetrated, he uttered but one deep and fearful curse, and, lifting his cutlass, with steady and determined aim,

before any one could interpose, brought it sheer down upon the head of the smuggler, who, hampered and unguarded, could make no resistance, and fell desperately wounded into the arms of his daughter. This was the signal for a recommencement of the fight. The smugglers crowded up from the vessel in overpowering numbers; a part of them attacked Kenny and his companions, while others surrounded Tresham, who was endeavouring to free Isabelle from her trammels, in order to render her more fit for flight. Glenvallich and Eeachan having covered the retreat of the females from the hut, were addressing themselves to assist their men; who, now hard pressed, and several of them already hurt, were falling back before the smugglers.

So furiously were the parties engaged, that the trampling of many feet proceeding from a body of men who issued from the ravine behind the hut, was unheard; nor was their approach perceived, until a voice thundered out, "On them, boys!—close with them!—cut them off from their boats!" And Glenvallich, turning his head, perceived a party of some five-and-twenty or thirty armed men clad in blue jackets and glazed hats, and headed by an officer in naval uniform, running towards them at speed.

"Halloo, fellows! down with your swords, ye scoundrels! What, fighting among yourselves—and about a wench, too! Let go the woman,

you rascals !” and aiming a stroke of his cutlass at one of the fellows, who had already stunned Tresham with a blow, and was dragging Isabelle away, he prostrated him at his feet. The rest of his party had now closed in, and were driving the smugglers before them towards the shore ; but their officer stopped to assist Isabelle, who, deprived of Tresham’s assistance, had also sunk upon the ground. “ What have we here ?” said he ; “ this woman can’t surely belong to them.”

“ William !—O heavens ! dearest William !—Can it be ?” exclaimed Isabelle, looking up, and stretching out her arms towards the young man.

“ Almighty God !—my sister !” was the reply. And on this strange field of battle, under circumstances so extraordinary,—far from their home and all familiar objects,—did the brother and the sister, after a separation of many years, thus meet and embrace !

CHAPTER XIII.

Fleet foot in the corrie !
Sage counsel in cumber !
Red hand in the forray !
How sound is thy slumber !

THE fight was ended—and the providential interference of the young sailor and his party may be explained in a few words. A frigate, returning from the Baltic station, had seen and given chase to a suspicious-looking lugger, which had escaped her on the preceding night. An old seaman on board, however, once a smuggler on this coast, recommended a search in Loch Mouneard, volunteering to guide the party. Three boats were ordered to this service : at the guide's suggestion, one of the crews were landed in order to cut off the retreat of the smugglers to the interior, while the other two proceeded up the loch. Lieutenant Stewart, who had charge of the enterprise, chose

to take the former part of it upon himself. The result has been described. The two remaining boats, having rounded the point of the Mull of Borda, pulled up to the lugger as she lay helpless and aground, while the crew was attacked by their comrades on the land side. Resistance was vain, and soon utterly ceased; and there remained but to examine the state of the field.

Of the smugglers, two men were killed outright, and many were wounded more or less severely; but of all who had suffered in the fray, there were none found in so desperate a plight as the chief of the smugglers, black Kenneth Dhoruv, and the brave but unfortunate Duncan Maccombich.

No sooner had the fate of the day been decided, than Glenvallich, alarmed at not observing the portly form of Duncan among those who rallied round him, went towards the hut, near the door of which Kenny was already lamenting over his friend. The glazing eye of the forester was fixed in ghastly vacancy on the countenance of his comrade, who on his side was lavishing expressions of the most earnest affection on the dying man, and endeavouring to recall him to consciousness by the tenderest and most endearing attentions. Dreadfully shocked at the catastrophe, Glenvallich had the body of the forester supported on the spot where it lay, and was proceeding to examine his wound, when young Stewart, who had left his sister in the care of Tresham, and was lookin^g

about to see what duty pressed most, came up to the spot. "Aye," observed the young lieutenant, too much accustomed to such scenes, to be greatly moved by them, "I see that poor fellow has lost the number of his mess—he's gone, I fancy."

"God forbid!" said Glenvallich; "he is a good and faithful servant. I should be much shocked to think his hurt so bad."

"I'm afraid it couldn't well be worse," replied Stewart, eyeing the small red orifice, which, surrounded by a slight blue circle, appeared towards the right side of the breast; "but there's a surgeon's mate in one of the boats, that will tell you more about it. Hey, you, Evans!" cried he to a seaman who was passing, "send Mr. Thompson here."

The surgeon's mate came, cast his eyes upon the wound, looked grave, thrust the fore-finger of his right hand with perfect composure into the deceitful opening—shook his head—drew a silver probe from a tattered, business-like pocket case of instruments—plunged it far, far into the unfortunate forester's body—watched its direction—coolly returned it to its case—and then said, "Sir, the man is gone, past cure in this world—sorry I can do no good."

But the probing of his wound had in some degree recalled the slumbering vitality of the poor forester: a quivering movement pervaded his limbs, and his eyes recovered somewhat of animation.

“We may give him a drop of a cordial,” observed the surgeon; “it may revive him for awhile, but he cannot recover. See, there is no outward flow of blood, but there’s internal hemorrhage. It must soon choak him.”

Accordingly the cordial was administered, and the unfortunate Maccombich soon began to gaze wildly around him.

“Where am I?” asked he, in Gaelic;—then observing his master, who was kneeling beside him, with looks of extreme concern: “What ails your honour?” said he, “where are they all? Kenny?—stop—I mind—I dinna ken what’s come ow’r me.” And as he attempted to lift his hand to his brow he stopped, perplexed by his own unaccountable sensations; for the internal bleeding was already fast depriving him of strength. At length his bewildered senses appeared to clear a little. “O—I mind—I mind noo,”—he shuddered violently. “Aye, it *was* hersel’; and for the *third* time, too. Ah, your honour wunna laugh at me noo!” said he, with a smile, which the sinking of his features rendered ghastly.

“Laugh at you, my poor fellow; God knows how distressed I am at this—but keep a good heart—you will do well yet, I trust.”

“No; never, your honour; never—there’s a feeling here, that tells me I’ll never stir from this bit in life. Never more will I follow your honour to hill or forest, or show you the track o’ a deer!

But the forest 'ill be there, an' the bonny dun deer ; an' ye'll keep up my bit bothy, your honor, —an' Kenny there—where's Kenny ? he's the best lad ye can hae to put in't ; he's a good, kind, honest lad !" Poor Kenny, already weeping like a child, now lost all command of himself, and sobbed aloud. " Dinna, dinna tak' on so, man," said Duncan, feeling for the hand that was now engaged in supporting the sinking form. " It's better as it is—it's the Lord's will ! an' it was *her* will too. I didna think she wud have hated me in the grave !"

" But, my good Maccombich, believe me that she whom you saw was none other than the daughter of that same black Kenneth, that wounded you so foully."

" Aye, your honour's very good—but——"

" Well ; but Duncan, if I should bring her this moment before you, would you be convinced ?" asked Glenvallich, anxious to soothe the last moments of his faithful servant. " Do not persist in maintaining that unfortunate fancy against reason and fact. Shall I bring her ?"

" Bring May !—bring May Macivor ! your honour ?" muttered the forester, whose senses always somewhat astray upon that subject, were now wandering under the influence of approaching dissolution.

" No ; not May Macivor, but *Mary*, Kenneth's daughter."

“Weel—weel, your honour!” said he, with a sigh of exhaustion; and Glenvallich immediately went to fetch the poor girl.

He found her weeping over her father, who was in little better state than the enemy he had so ungenerously slain; but supported by her lover, Eachan, she was persuaded, at the instance of Glenvallich, to repair to the forester’s side. Pain and lassitude, and that frightful sense of oppression, which is always the consequence of internal bleeding, was weighing heavily on poor Maccombich, who had already closed his eyes, and only now and then called for drink. At the sound of his master’s voice, he once more opened them, and their dull gaze fell upon the figure of Mary, who stood shuddering at the spectacle. A sudden gleam of brilliancy and intelligence illuminated the fast-glazing orbs, and lighted up his pallid features, as this vision caught his view.

“May! O May! is ’t for me that ye’re crying! an’ are ye come to pardon me at last?” exclaimed he, in faltering accents.

“My good Maccombich, this is Mary—the girl I told you of; it is no vision—no May Macivor—see, she is real—be satisfied and at rest.”

“No May Macivor!—who then? who can it be?”

“It is the daughter of Kenneth Dhoruv.”

“Daughter of Kenneth Dhoruv! that’s Dougald Dorach! O then as sure as I am a dying

man, that lassie's none other than the daughter o' her who was once my own dear May Macivor! Ochone! dear, dear lassie, come near to me; lay your hand upon my brow, an' say that ye forgie me in the name o' your blessed mother!"

Overcome by the painful character of the scene, no less than by her own peculiar sorrows, the poor girl shuddered, and was unable to articulate a word. Yielding to the influence of Glenvallich's arm, and assisted by her own Eachan, she knelt by the side of the forester, and placed her trembling hand upon his pale and clammy brow.

"O God have mercy on you," she sobbed out, "an' bless you, for blessing my poor, poor mother; it's the first blessing ever her child heard called upon her head!"

"An' may the Almighty, in whose presence I most be afore an hour be past, bless an' protect yoursel', darling; is the prayer o' a dying man! but where is she gone?—rise me up, Kenny, man, I canna see a styme? Where's Macgilliecullach? Where's Mr. Tresham?"

"Here, my good Maccombich," said Glenvallich; "and here's Mr. Tresham coming;—is there any thing I could do for you to make your mind easy?"

"O sir, you have been a kind maister to me—a thriftless foolish lad like mysel'. An' I canna—I shudna be troubling your honour; but O, if this miserable body cud but rest in kenn'd ground! I

canna thole laying my bones in a strange country ;
O, if I cud but lie in the bonnie Glen Orree !”

“ It shall be done, my good fellow, it shall be done ; set your mind at rest.”

“ Aye, blessings on you ; blessings on you ; an’ —an’ aside May—May’s friends wi’ me noo—she wunna scorn me or frown on me noo.”

“ I promise you it shall be so, Maccombich,” said Glenvallich, in accents disturbed by grief, and graspin gthe hard hand of his servant. A faint pressure was the only reply.

At this moment Tresham, who after recovering from the effects of his blow, had till then been occupied with Isabelle, and who had sought to withdraw her attention from the painful scenes around her, came up at the call of Glenvallich, just in time to get a last look at his humble friend ; and dreadfully shocked he was to remark the unerring tokens of death upon the countenance of one whom he so highly regarded. To his anxious inquiries, and expressions of painful sympathy, Maccombich was by that time almost insensible. The well-known voice, however, caught the ear of the dying man ; although his glazed eyes sought in vain to catch a glimpse of his young favourite.

“ Ye have gotten her back, Mr. Tresham ? we saved her, after all ; thon black villain was na able— But I canna see you—my een’s a’ dark noo. God’s blessing on you both ! Ye’ll maybe mind o’ Mac-

combich whiles, when ye're in the hill after the deer !”

The last words were faint and scarcely audible ; a deep convulsive shudder now seized him ; the blood, which the failing strength of the wounded man prevented him from bringing up, now fast filled up the chest—he gasped for breath.

“ Glenvallich !” he muttered inarticulately, “ O God—— !” A few words in Gaelic, scarcely distinguishable, succeeded. The shudder of death for a moment agitated the limbs—that fearful sound which announces dissolution, was heard in the throat—and the soul of the brave and faithful Maccombich returned to him who gave it !

“ May God have mercy on him, and pardon all his sins ! exclaimed Glenvallich, reverently, as with his own hand he closed the eyes of his old and trusty servant. And for some moments not a word was spoken. But the sounds of honest grief which burst from one and all of those who had formed a group around the body, attested how much they had loved and regarded the kind, the artless, and true-hearted forester.

We have no desire to disgust our readers, by contrasting the death scene of the good and faithful servant, which we have faintly attempted to sketch, with that of the hardened ruffian, which was passing at the same time within the distance of but a few yards.

The stern, daring, obdurate character of Kenneth Dhoruv was remarkably illustrated in the last act of his lawless life. Resolved to carry through his desperate enterprize, he would have persevered had it cost the blood of all his opponents to do so; a conduct singularly contrasted with that of his more generous adversary, who refrained until the last from striking the blow, and when at length, in self defence, he forced himself to do so, it was with a hesitation and reluctance, which in the end proved fatal to himself; for the ball of the forester, unerring on other occasions, only wounded his antagonist, at a moment when life, perhaps, depended on the chance; and when a more relentless feeling might with equal certainty have sent it through his heart. Kenneth, wounded in the thigh, received the shot without flinching; and so firm and resolute did his step continue, that none believed him hurt. But Kenny's blow had been dealt with too good a will to fail of its effect. The skull had been penetrated, and part of its substance carried off, together with a fearful mass of muscle, so that one side of the face was desperately injured. The swelling which instantly supervened completed the ghastliness of the spectacle, and in this condition did the unhappy man lay, imprecating curses on all who approached, and still making frantic efforts to rise, until the stupor consequent upon the nature of his wound, rendered him as torpid as he had at first been furious.

His ill-fated daughter never left him, and continued to lavish on him those pious attentions, which as his child it was her duty to bestow, but which he as a father had but little merited at her hands. His death, which did not take place until midnight, released her from her painful duty, and consigned her to the only fitting protection she could for the time receive—the company and humane attentions of Isabelle Stewart.

CHAPTER XIV.

FEMALE FORTITUDE.

Ruffian, let go that rude uncivil touch!

AND what had been the emotions, what the sufferings of Isabelle, during the succession of painful and trying scenes, which it had been her lot to witness in the lapse of the few preceding days—the nature of these scenes may be imagined by our readers, but it seems due to the courage and constancy of the young lady, concisely to describe them.

On that eventful afternoon, when, summoned by a false message of alarm to the presence of her sick nurse, Isabelle hurried towards the cottage, she had reached the verge of the wood above the dell, void of all suspicion, and thinking only of the scene she was about to encounter, when startled by a rustling in the sere underwood, she turned her head and saw two men advancing rapidly

towards her. So near had they approached before she was aware of their purpose, that only the one loud shriek, which had conveyed the truth to Elsie had time to pass her lips, ere she was seized, 'a plaid cast over her head, and, being lifted from the ground, she was rapidly hurried away through the bushes. In less than three minutes she felt herself lifted upon the back of an animal, on which she was held by one man while another led it along. The few words which passed were in Gaelic, and in whispers, and Isabelle, even when she recovered that presence of mind which so unexpected an event had for the moment deprived her of, found herself muffled even to the hazard of stifling, in the wrappings which enveloped her, so that all attempts at escape or complaint were alike hopeless and disregarded.

For more than half an hour was she subjected to this painful and rapid progress, when the men who attended her halted: she was lifted from the horse and found herself standing upon dry heather. The plaid was unbound, and the deep voice of one of the ruffians threatened her with instant death should she offer either to resist or exclaim.

"I do not fear you, fellows," said Isabelle; "you dare not hurt me—the hand of the law is over your heads, and the arm of God is over mine! set me free, I command you, or proceed at your peril."

The barking of a dog at one time excited in her the hope that assistance might be brought to her aid, and she raised her voice and called loudly for help. So finding her unawed by their menaces, the ruffians, in spite of her struggles, passed a handkerchief around her mouth, in order to restrain her cries: a piece of woollen cloth was then thrown over her head, so as effectually to muffle her eyes and prevent her from observing what course they pursued. A thick blanket or plaid was also wound around her person, hampering her arms as completely as her eyes; and in this condition she was once more lifted upon the horse. Another mantle was then wrapped around her—for it was obviously their desire to protect her from the exceeding bitterness of the weather,—and thus they once more continued their way.

The threats and remonstrances which Isabelle made use of during these proceedings, in hopes of dissuading or terrifying her captors from persevering in their audacious purpose, were utterly disregarded by them, and there remained for her, therefore, but the resolution to preserve her composure and firmness, that she might avail herself of any accidental occurrence calculated to favour her escape. The rumours which had prevailed around Airdruthmore, and which had alarmed even the judicious Glenvallich, were now explained; nor is it wonderful that, under all circumstances, the suspicions of Isabelle should fasten at once

upon the laird of Ballytully and his crafty uncle, as the contrivers of this extraordinary outrage. Yet, like others of the family, she felt puzzled to imagine what good end they could propose by so violent a measure.

“They cannot hope to *force* me into compliance with their terms,” said she mentally; “they cannot imagine me so weak as to yield to terror what I have refused to affection!—no, I am not to be intimidated,—they will find me proof against moral compulsion—and they cannot—no, they dare not resort to violence!—it is not possible that this can long continue—I shall be missed, followed, traced, and that instantly;—my father—Glenvallich—Tresham—yes, Tresham—*he* will never rest—*he* will search Scotland from sea to sea till he discovers me!”—and the thought of Tresham’s misery when he should reach Airdruthmore, and learn his misfortune, gave a pang to her heart which indignation and astonishment had hitherto prevented her from feeling on her own account.

But the busy restless mind would still relapse into conjecture.

“If these men cannot hope to terrify me into compliance, nor to conceal me long from the search of my friends, what can be their motive?—what their intentions?”—and then arose in formidable array the natural fears “which flesh is heir to,” as her imagination conjured up a host of dark and terrible narratives,—of persons thus spirited away

to the mad-house or the convent—to the distant or the foreign prison ! It were vain to enumerate the succession of fearful images which passed in dim and threatening order through her brain, as, after the first burst of indignant excitement, her spirits confessed the power of external circumstances, and, in spite of herself, her resolution sunk for awhile under the influence of anxiety, terror, and fatigue. But the mind of Isabelle, powerful and high-toned by nature, had been well regulated by principle and habit; and her imagination, although sufficiently vivid, was yet under that due control which renders it useful instead of dangerous to its possessor. She felt the enervating influence of such fancies, and resolved to make every effort to banish them from her thoughts. It was obvious that, when a search should be commenced, a single practical fact would be of more use than the most specious speculations in detecting the course of her captors, and instead of permitting her thoughts to wander at large, she confined them to the consideration of how she might best aid the efforts of her friends. It was under this impulse that, finding it impossible to disengage any other part of her dress, she thought of dropping the shoe which had afforded so important a hint to her pursuers, and which, as she sat upon the horse, she found it easy to disengage from her foot.

The whole evening and greater part of the night did her inexorable guards continue their progress

in spite of wind and storm. Fatigue at length began to oppress her sorely; the fear of falling enabled her for a long while to bear up against its influence; but at length, during the darkness which accompanied a stormy gust, her horse made a false step, and, unable to recover the effect of the jerk, she was thrown from its back. Fortunately, a heather tuft received her, and prevented her from sustaining any injury, and the derangement produced by the accident enabled her to articulate a few sounds, which attracted the leader's attention. However rude and stern in his demeanour, the man had not as yet been guilty of any piece of wanton cruelty nor of indelicacy towards her; and when Isabelle, instead of making any outcry, merely remonstrated against the inordinate fatigue to which they were subjecting her, and declared her inability to proceed any farther without some rest, the man replied, with somewhat of a surly respect, that "there was no rest to be had in a wide muir, but that if she would bear up for a matter of two miles farther, she might then have an hour or two to sleep." He also adjusted her mufflings so that she might breathe more freely, and, thus relieved, they plodded on for almost a weary hour, so that Isabelle's strength and firmness were almost exhausted; when having descended into what appeared to be a deep hollow,—for the darkness permitted not of vision had her eyes even remained free—she was lifted from the jaded stumbling beast, and soon found

herself seated on a hard but dry spot, where, after her head was released from its bandages and muffles, she was informed that she might lie down and rest for awhile.

Too thankful for the indulgence to incur the risk of forfeiture by imprudence, she only begged for a draught of water, which being brought, she committed her safety in a fervent prayer to that all-seeing God to whom darkness and light are the same, and whose power is as infinite as his wisdom is inscrutable; and, calmed by this act of devotion, fell into a profound slumber, from which, after a period, the length of which she could not determine, she was summoned to proceed on her journey.

Darkness still brooded over the hills, as, mounted on the pack-saddle which was bound on the animal's back, they led her down a steep declivity; and, after a farther march of about three more weary hours, during which she became aware that morning had dawned, she was once more released from her toil and permitted to repose.

The rest was welcome, but sleep did not now come so readily to visit her. She was now in a species of bothy, black as smoke and soot could make it; but further she could distinguish nothing. Of her guards, one alone remained watching at the door of the hut. While ruminating thus, it occurred to her, that she might at least make one more effort, if only to discover what was intended to be done with her; so summoning her

courage, she addressed the individual at the entrance. But her voice only brought in the ruffian who appeared to be chief of the gang, and whom the reader will have recognized as Kenneth Dhoruv. Impatiently and surlily silencing her with a threat that in case of contumacy the mufflings should be replaced, he contented himself with thus replying to her remonstrances: "Once for all, be quiet; a better fate is meant for you than you seek for yourself—you once was told so before—you was warned, but you forgot the caution—you cannot shun fate, so be at rest; no evil is designed you, but good; seek to know no more—the wish and the attempt will be equally vain. But you have still far to go, and must prepare for it; refreshments such as can be had here shall be set before you, and I advise you to accept them; we shall not move for some hours yet."

The good sense of Isabelle told her that further remonstrance would only be prejudicial to her interests, and she therefore was silent. But her thoughts were as active as ever, and employed themselves in seeking to bring to remembrance the voice and manner of the ruffian who played the principal part in this nefarious transaction. That the voice and form were in some degree familiar, she felt assured, nor was it long ere she became certain that they belonged to the same person who had alarmed herself and her friend Miss Tresham some time before at Elsie's cottage. While occu-

pied with these cogitations, the person entered bearing a wooden vessel of milk with some hot potatoes and oat bread ; and though anxiety precluded all sense of hunger, yet Isabelle, alive to the importance of maintaining her strength for possible trials or exertions, forced herself to partake of the proffered food. It even refreshed her, and as no disturbance molested her in the solitary hut, slumber insensibly stole over her senses and she continued to sleep for several hours.

The shades of night were falling before Isabelle was again summoned to recommence her melancholy journey ; and with a sinking heart she saw that a day had elapsed without symptom or sign of pursuit ; but summoning patience to her aid, and putting her trust in the divine assistance, she calmly, meekly prepared to follow her guards.

They had made no great progress before a second halt took place, for what purpose she could form no idea ; but it was somewhat hastily terminated, and she was sensible of a long and tedious ascent, succeeded by a dangerous descent, during which the whole strength and efforts of the party seemed to be required for leading her horse in safety, and more than once she was borne from its back and carried in their arms for several paces. The same precaution of blindfolding her eyes and hampering her arms, as formerly, had been taken, so that although she could breathe more freely, she

continued in utter ignorance of the direction in which she had been carried.

We need not describe the long and painful march which brought Isabelle at length to the hut where she was found by her pursuers. She arrived there exhausted and dispirited, but unbroken in courage and in firmness; yet her constancy was severely tried, when she heard the roar of the booming waves, for the fearful thought that she was to be borne from her native land overwhelmed her with horror, and she felt as if hope were almost to be extinguished by a separation so terrible and so complete.

Lodged as her guards now conceived in perfect safety, the bandages were removed from her eyes, but the glimpses she obtained through the miserable cranny in the wall which admitted air without light, served only to confirm her dread; for every thing convinced her that she was really on the sea coast; and the sudden bustle and uproar which attended the arrival of the lugger, served to complete her certainty of evil, and almost her despair. The only morsel of comfort which her arrival at this place afforded her, was the presence and assistance of a female, Mary, the daughter of Kenneth, who by command of her father now offered her services; and the sweet feminine air and modest demeanour of the poor girl, imparted a degree of consolation to the agitated mind and harassed

body of Isabelle, which was inexpressibly soothing.

From Mary she sought to obtain some portion of that information which she had vainly endeavoured to elicit from her father; but the girl was too ignorant or too much in awe of him to drop any hint that Isabelle could profit by. The distress however which she evinced when besought by Miss Stewart to say whether her fears of being carried abroad were well-founded, confirmed the worst fears of that young lady, and appeared like the seal of her fate.

But this painful uncertainty was not doomed to last. In spite of all their efforts, Kenneth and his comrades had not reached their destination above three hours before their pursuers. Isabelle, exhausted by fatigue and mental anguish, was lying on a miserable heather bed in the hut, receiving with kindness, although with a breaking heart, the respectful assiduities of the poor girl, who, touched with the beauty and elegance as well as with the sweetness of the unfortunate sufferer, was doing her best to soothe and comfort her, when the attention of both was arrested by the growling of the dog. Before they had time to make any remark, it began to bark loudly, and a sudden bustle was heard at the door. The next sound made the heart of Isabelle throb with an almost sickening pang of sudden hope, for it was the voice of Glenvallich as he summoned the guards at the

door ; next came the sharp report of a shot, with shouts and execrations—and then—O how did her very soul bound, as the voice of Tresham, of her own chosen and devoted Tresham, thrilled through her heart's core, as it called upon his Isabelle ! She sprung from the couch on which she still lay listening—the reader knows the rest.

CHAPTER XV.

CONSEQUENCES—DISCLOSURES—A DEATH-BED.

Upon her hearth the fire is dead,
The smoke in air has vanished,
The last long lingering look is given,
The shudering start, the inward groan,
And the pilgrim on her way is gone!

Pass breath !
Come death !

THE busy scenes we have attempted to portray, scarcely occupied so much time as we have expended in describing them, and yet so late was the hour, that before the prisoners had been secured, the wounded men attended to, and the more imperative points of duty performed, the shades of evening had fallen, and it became necessary to consider what could be done for the comfort of the party for the night.

The most obvious expedient was to prepare the

lugger's accommodation for their reception; but this on examination proved to be so filthy and uncomfortable, that Lieutenant Stewart, with the ready invention of a sailor, soon hit upon another arrangement. Some spare sails taken from the vessel were formed into a sort of tent, which, by means of blankets and heather, was rendered tolerably proof against the cold. A part of this was especially prepared for the use of Isabelle and her female attendant. Provisions in abundance, though coarse of their kind, were on the spot, and the Lieutenant, aided by Tresham, both fertile in expedients, contrived in a wonderfully short time to fit out a shelter and to provide a repast which might have satisfied the desires of a more fastidious party.

"I shall remain here for the night," said young Stewart; "a party must be placed in charge of the lugger—she must be warped into the deep when the tide makes. I shall send these chaps off to the frigate with two of the boats, and as our skipper is an excellent fellow, I don't doubt but I may get a few days leave to see you home—how astonished the old gentleman will be—eh, Belle?"

"Ah! my dear William; how grateful should we all be to that kind and gracious Providence which has interfered so signally in our favour!"

"Well, and so we are—and so I am—and shall be—but just now I can only be happy. By Heavens, though, Belle, we were but just in the nick

of time; one tide later, and you were off to Holland; and one minute later, and these good friends would have paid the piper with a broken head at least, if they did not bear you company. Some of the lads have got it hot enough as it is."

"Aye, truly," said Tresham gravely, "and some that I very much regret. They deserved a better fate. You will be pained, Isabelle. Poor Maccombich——"

"Good heavens! hurt? What, much hurt? O do not say so."

"Aye, poor fellow! he has fought his last fight, and done his last earthly duty. He is at rest."

"Good God!" exclaimed the young lady, with horror in her looks. Then bursting into tears, "Tresham, Tresham," said she, sobbing bitterly, "I have been dearly purchased! The faithful creature! poor, poor Maccombich!"

"Come, come, Belle, don't take on so; I dare say he was a good hand in his way, and he has done his duty, and that's all a man can do. He couldn't have gone off with more credit. Better a thousand times than kicking his heels in a fever, or dying bed-ridden with old age. Come, cheer up and dry your eyes, girl. I must leave you for a moment, but I see you're in good hands. I must go and write a few lines to the skipper;"—and off went the gay lieutenant to execute this piece of duty.

While the seamen, under orders of a young midshipman, were employed in securing their prisoners, there was one of them who made urgent request to be carried before the gentlemen, as he had, he said, a communication of great importance to make. The men, supposing it might relate to some discovery of run goods, and thereby augment the value of their own prize, readily made known his desire to their officer, who communicated it to Lieutenant Stewart. The probability that this discovery might relate to the recent transactions and concerns of the smuggling association of Glen Shlichard immediately occurred to Glenvallich, and at his request the man was brought before the party.

The moment he appeared, Tresham recognised him as one of the three men concerned in the scene at Elsie's cottage—the very one who acted the part of spokesman until rebuked by the old woman; and Glenvallich recollected in him the leader, who in the skirmish in the Garru-glaikan had rallied the men when at first showing symptoms of submission. On being required to state what he had to say, he intimated his desire of turning king's evidence against the rest in case of a prosecution, and repeated his declaration that he had disclosures to make of great importance to *some gentlemen*, but which he would only impart in case of receiving a promise of favour and protection. "And if ye kent what I ken, Mr. Traisham,"

said he, addressing that gentleman, I'm thinking ye wudna haggle long about the terms."

"And what can you possibly have to tell that I am likely to care about hearing, you ruffian?" said Tresham, disgusted at the fellow's impudent address.

"Aye—ruffian; but ruffian here, ruffian there, what wud ye think if it rested wi' me to gie a good bit help to the ould man that you an' the Laird o' Glenvallich's taken such a lift o'—the honest ould gentleman at Airdruthmore, the father o' yon bonnie dooe that all this splore has been about; a bad hour to them that ever gar'd us meddle wi' it, say I! What would ye say, gin I shuld tell ye that a word o' mine might gie him back his broad lands, an' the want o' it leave him a landless laird?"

"The d—d scoundrel! what does he mean?" thundered young Stewart. "What has all this to do with——"

"Stay a little," said Glenvallich, interrupting him with a significant gesture; "pray let me speak for a moment. Whatever you may suppose, fellow, of your power over Airdruthmore, you overrate it, be assured, for we have evidence and proofs which place that gentleman's affairs out of all danger. But if I understand your meaning, and if the nature of your intelligence be such as I guess, you shall not want reasonable protection, provided you are open and unreserved."

The lowering and insolent countenance of the smuggler indicated a degree of defiance which Glenvallich dreaded might lead to ill consequences, and he therefore hastened to interpose and prevent them. "Hark ye, friend; when I tell you that a certain *pocket-book and papers*, which I dare say you know of, was *not* burnt in the Slochd-uaine, but *is in our hands*, you will understand that we are in possession of more than you think for."

The countenance of the smuggler instantly fell; with a muttered oath he grumbled out, "I see your honour kens what I thought was a secret; but there's something more behind a' that yet. There's may be more fouks under Niel Paterson's belt than they or ye think for."

"Well, sir, I renew my promise, which, I take it, you may trust to, and I am certain these gentlemen will confirm it. If you do make any useful discoveries, you shall have the full benefit of them, whatever happens, so far as our interest goes."

"Well, your honour; I'm content, and now ye shall hear all that Niel Paterson can tell ye."

The examination lasted long, but in substance it was nearly as follows:—Paterson, from a very early period of life a smuggler, had been for many years the associate and coadjutor of John Macraw—alias Dougald Dorach, alias Kenneth Dhoruv—and was engaged as assistant in most of his com-

plicated schemes of lawless villany, for the powerful mind of Macraw, fitted by nature for a far superior station, had at all times held his associates in subjection. Early after his return to the Highlands, the Laird of Ballytully, to his own misfortune, among his other low and disreputable associates, fell in with this Macraw under the name of Kenneth Dhoruv, (as we shall still call him,) by whose arts and intrigues the young man was rapidly initiated and involved in a maze of unlawful practices. The prospect of rapid and extensive gain, at one time actually realized without much risk, rendered these still more attractive; and so great was the success of these adventurers in the contraband trade, that Roderick Macaskill, led by some expressions of his uncle to conclude that the man of law would not be reluctant to partake in smugglers' gains, actually proposed to him a junction of interests. The suggestion was only partially acceded to by the worthy W. S. That sagacious personage, aware of the ticklish nature of the ground, yet tempted by the richness of the bait, complied only so far as to embark certain sums in the concern, but cautiously avoided implicating his responsibility, by granting any document that might thereafter rise up in judgment and condemn him.

Unfortunately for Thomas Macaskill, Paterson, with an address for which neither the uncle nor the nephew had given him credit, watched his

opportunities, and collected a mass of evidence of the old man's virtual copartnership, so clear as to place him completely in the power of the subordinate villain, and sufficient to convict him criminally in case of a judicial investigation. These proofs he now tendered to the gentlemen in return for their promised protection, and in this manner did they obtain the sole required link in the chain of facts which placed the Macaskills at their mercy.

But although this was the most important result obtained from the confessions of Paterson, it by no means comprised the whole of his information. Many circumstances which Tresham had been at a loss to comprehend or account for were elucidated by the explanations of this thorough-paced villain. The origin and progress of Ballytully's jealousy, and the extent of his malignity, were fully developed; and so intense, it appeared, had the latter become, as to induce him, if their informant might be trusted, to practise even against the life of his more fortunate rival. In this atrocious scheme of villany he found a willing coadjutor in his associate, Kenneth Dhoruv, who made common cause against one whose activity of enterprise and prying curiosity, (for to such cause was attributed his involuntary visit to Slochd-uaine,) promised danger to their joint interests as well as to the more private designs of Ballytully. In his zeal to guard against such danger, and to remove the dreaded

instrument of it, many a day did Kenneth, aided occasionally by Paterson himself, watch the steps and actions of Tresham, and more than once had his life almost fallen the sacrifice of their jealous suspicion, and Kenneth's bitter dislike; for Kenneth, alike unprincipled and reckless of crime, would have little hesitated at such a sacrifice, could it have been effected without danger to himself and his confederates.

We have seen that the increasing difficulties of Ballytully rendered him every hour more anxious to prop his falling fortunes by an alliance with the Airdruthmore family, and his rage against the young Englishman may be conceived, when he found that even this last resource was snatched from him by his hated rival.

In this state of perplexity and disappointment did the intelligence of the bold and successful expedition of the two friends into Glen Shlichard, reach the mortified laird. Hope and moderation were now at an end--prudence had become useless; he was a ruined desperate man, and by desperate measures alone could he hope, in any degree, to retrieve his fallen fortunes. But one chance remained, and on that he resolved to hazard every thing:—he determined on the bold and almost frantic expedient of carrying Isabelle off. Once in his power, he conceived that he might make his own terms with her father and Tresham; and that though he might not succeed in forcing her to be-

come his wife, he might, should he be able to carry her out of the country, away from the protection of British laws, extort from them a sum of money which would at least enable him to live in comfort abroad. To conceal her in Britain he knew was impossible ; but once in possession of her person, to carry her off from its shores to the haunts of his lawless connexions abroad, would not only be possible but easy of accomplishment.

To effect this object, then, he taxed all his remaining influence with his ruffian associates, who, tempted by the hope of high rewards, engaged to carry it into execution. A fast sailing lugger was prepared for a run to the west coast of the Highlands, about the time when all other engines should be prepared for coming into operation. The developement of the plan is already before the reader. We have seen the ingenuity with which the guardians of Isabelle were decoyed from their post—a stratagem chiefly contrived and conducted by the genius of the subtle Thomas Macaskill—we have marked the progress and event of this complicated scheme of villainy—the final result to its perpetrators will hereafter appear. We must, for the present, return to the party on the shores of Loch Mouneard.

The night passed tranquilly ; many and interesting were the mutual explanations that took place, for much was there on all sides to learn and to explain ; and the fortunate event of the day's

adventures was a fertile subject of rejoicing, though the painful fate of the faithful forester threw a saddening shade over the spirits of Glenvallich, and even of Tresham, in spite of his bright anticipations.

As for the attendants, their sorrow was clamorous; the grief of poor Kenny in particular was overpowering. They performed, as well as might be, the last melancholy duties to the remains of their loved comrade, and means were taken to provide a temporary coffin in which the body might be removed to Glen Orra; for Glenvallich resolved, as the only means of evincing his regard for the memory and worth of the dead, that at least his last wishes should be complied with, and that he should rest in death beside her whom he loved in life, although an adverse destiny and the treacherous arts of a villain had so unhappily separated them.

How sweet is the repose which succeeds to toil, and danger, and distress! When we feel that our perils are all past, and are soothed to rest by the blessed assurance of security and happiness!

Who has not felt that delicious buoyancy of spirit which flows from a consciousness of bliss, though the cause be not present to the mind, when, even in sleep, we feel that we are happy, and wake, and wonder for a moment, what can have occasioned the exhilarating sensation within us?—Even Isabelle, much as she had suffered, and worn out as she was in mind and body, awoke tranquil and

happy ; and although she gazed around her in astonishment, marvelling for a moment where she was, and what had come over her, yet she rose relieved of bodily fatigue, and with a mind refreshed and invigorated.

Female attendance there was none ; for the unfortunate Mary was still weeping over the corse of him, who, however rude, and even ruffian-like had been his conduct, was still her father, and save her lover, the only human being to whom she could cling for aid or sympathy. Yet Isabelle came forth from her rude pavilion with a light heart and elastic step, for she now remembered all that had passed, and had poured out her heart in prayer to the Being who had so mercifully supported her in all her trials ; and hope had revived in her soul, for she knew the true and steady friends who were near her.

Long before she awoke, a boat had arrived from the frigate, bearing a kind and sympathizing communication from her worthy commander to his lieutenant, readily granting the required leave of absence, transmitting some conveniences and refreshments for the comfort of his sister, together with a tender of what ever further assistance the party might require, and directing the prize to be placed under charge of a master's mate and crew, who were sent for the purpose.

Preparations for sailing were already forward in the lugger. By the assistance and information

of Paterson, the goods which had been landed were drawn from their hiding-places, and re-embarked, and the vessel herself was brought to anchor in deep water. Thus, nothing remained for the officers and crew but to take charge and set sail; but as it was of some consequence on the lady's account to find an easier road home than that by which they came, the party availed themselves of the vessel's assistance to carry them to a point at no great distance, from whence a more practicable path led to the vicinity of Strath Einort.

We shall not dwell on the particulars of this happy journey, in the course of which Tresham enjoyed abundant opportunity of relieving his full heart by converse with Isabelle; and the delight of rendering her all those attentions and that assistance which circumstances admitted of upon so fatiguing an excursion. Nor shall we attempt to describe the rapture of her worthy father, as he clasped to his bosom his lost and darling daughter, and embraced the son—his gallant and only boy—who, as by a special bounty of Providence, had been made so greatly the instrument of her deliverance.

But there was yet one scene—a painful and trying scene, awaiting Isabelle; and though unmarked by the stern interest and horror of those she had so lately witnessed, it failed not to cast a gloom over her mind, which even the happy prospects that opened on her view were unable for a

time to dispel. For awhile after the departure of Tresham and his friend upon their quest, old Elsie had betrayed a querulous restlessness of mind, which sorely perplexed her youthful attendant, and induced her to send for aid to the house, intimating at the same time her own private fears, "that the ould woman hadna long to leeve." The distress and perplexity which pervaded the whole establishment at Airdruthmore, occasioned these complaints to meet with but small attention; but at length old Grizzie Mac Farlane, out of regard to the favourite of her dear young mistress, as well as from kindness to an old crony and former fellow-servant, on the third day after Isabelle had disappeared, paid Elsie a visit.

The condition in which she found the old nurse was abundantly symptomatic of her approaching end; for the emaciation of her person had become extreme, and the ghastliness of her aspect resembled the appearance of a corse. Contrary to the usual custom, the housekeeper observed that she paid little regard to those who entered, but continued to moan and to mumble inarticulate sentences, the meaning of which it was impossible to discover. But while Grizzie remained yet seated in the room, questioning the attendant regarding the condition of her charge, the voice of the old woman of a sudden became firm, and her articulation perfect.

"I kent it, and I said it," said she; "I kent

how it wud be, and otherwise it cudna be. Ill luck betide the man who daur'd affront Airdruthmore's daughter!—an' dearly has he paid for his wark! Dark evil man, from whom this withered heart has suffered so muckle ill—never will ye cheat man or ruin maiden more! See till him, where he lies in his blood—girnin' wi' pain an' wrath! But who is yon that's glowring ow'r the corse? The dark mist is in my een, and I canna see. But ochone! woe's me that the brave and the faithful should fall wi' the wicked an' the warthless!—that the blood o' the kind an' the heal should lapper wi' the gore o' the traitor an' the murderer! But who shall tax the doings o' the Lord, or daur to doubt his wisdom? Grizzie Mac Farlane, why sit ye there, woman, when ye shud mak' ready for the coming guests? Go home, and kill the fatted calf, for there'll be joy in Airdruthmore afore the week's done, far more than there has been dule and sorrow; an' there's them coming that 'ill mak' roof-tree and rafter ring again wi' shouts o' welcome and gladness!"

Astounded at this sudden burst, old Grizzie started up, and cast a terrified glance at her ancient friend. "Losh be here! what's she after noo—pity me, if the ould woman's no' gone frantic!—Ochone! what's a' that ye're sayin', Elsie, woman?—what are ye spaiking about joy and gladness at Airdruthmore, an' Miss Ezeabelle off and awa' the Lord knows where?"

But the visionary burst was past, and Els relapsing into silence, became wholly inattentive to Grizzie's astonishment or appeals. So home went the old housekeeper, pondering on the strange ways of her ancient companion; but when she reflected on all that had passed, and called to mind who had said it, hope and comfort entered her soul—*why*, she knew not and could not have told, for not one half of Elsie's oracular communication had she understood; but still she had gathered enough to impart a share of her own satisfaction to the anxious groups at home, and when the happy tidings made her gladness full, she failed not to value herself mightily upon the sagacity with which she had interpreted the old nurse's prophecy. "My blessing on the ould wife," said she, "she's worth all the taisheaters I ever seed or heard o,' for bra' news; I kent that good was coming whenever she begood to blethar yon gait. Ochone!—ochone!—pity me, that she should be so near her latter end!"

Accounts of Elsie's situation were not long of being communicated to Isabelle, upon her return to Airdruthmore, nor could she rest till she had hastened to see her old nurse. On this visit, although all danger of violence was at an end, she was accompanied by Tresham, as well as by her brother, who, little as of late years he had been at home, still remembered the old woman with interest and kindness.

They found her in a state of extreme exhaustion, supported in her bed by pillows, and partly resting in the arms of the young girl who attended her. Her plain attire was as usual neat and clean; but the seal of death was on her countenance, and it was evident she had not many hours to live. Sinking though she had been for some weeks before this time, Isabelle was deeply shocked at the rapid change which so short a time as that of her absence had produced upon the old woman.

“The best blessings o’ the Almighty be on you, dear, dear child!” ejaculated Elsie, feebly in reply to Isabelle’s affectionate inquiries. “I kent that ye wudna be long—an’ oh, it’s time ye shud come, for my soul’s wearying, hoverin’ atween time and eternity; but it cud na wun awa’ afore I seed you, darlin’—it’s the last leuk ye’ll ever hae o’ your ould moome in life—an’ I bless the Lord that he has permitted it!”

“Do not say so, dear moome—do not say so!” but the words stuck in her throat, and she could not proceed; for how could she speak the hope she did not feel—a hope which the slightest glance at the wasted form before her belied? “Ah! darling! ye see the truth ow’r plain—an’ far, far better is it so—for troth I’m wearying to be released. But there’s one wi’ you that I wud fain welcome, as a leal and true servant shud greet the best hope o’ the house, whose bread has nourished her. It’s a proud day to Elsie Mac

Leod—that a sinful, dying cretar should say so ! when the son o’ Airdruthmore comes under the roof that sheltered her so long. May the blessing o’ the Lord be upon him, an’ may the arm o’ the Most High overshadow him, an’ build up his house, whan I’m gone !—Let me feel the hand o’ my master’s son, afore I die.” In spite of pride and manhood, young Stewart was deeply affected ; he clasped the damp emaciated fingers of the old woman with his own hand, and bent over her to conceal an emotion, which certainly did him no discredit. To break the painful silence which succeeded the faint breathings of the old nurse’s blessings, Tresham addressed her : “ And have you no welcome for an old friend, Elsie ?—after all your warnings and advice, will you not greet me on my return with your own dear child ? ”

“ The heart of Elsie Mac Leod most be colder than it is even noo,” said she, with an effort—“ though the hand of death is on it, when she can forget the true friend an’ the warm heart—the chosen an’ appointed protector of the child of her bosom ; an’ if ever a rough word cam’ from the lips o’ an ould an’ sorely tried cretar, let her blessings make amends ;—mind, that if she gied you a black look, she spaed you a fair doom—and a happy weird may weel thole a hasty speech ; and as ye cherish my bonnie bairn, may ye be happy here and hereafter ! But, dear child, whare are ye ?—let me feel you near me.”

“Here, dear moome,” said Isabelle, whose heart chilled with alarm at the altered manner of her old nurse; “here—lean on me.”

“Aye, long hae I done that, maithal; the blessings o’ the dying be on ye, dear,” said Elsie, articulating now, with difficulty, as she slowly lifted her withered arms to enfold the fair form that bent over her. “These were the first arms that ever held you, darling, when your blessed mother lay a could corps—they’re feckless noo—an’ could—could like hersel’. Soon will I be wi’ her, an’ I’ll tell her o’ her bairn, that she’s good an’ fair, and like hersel’—an’ licht ’ill come back till my ould een, an’ I’ll see her that I never seed but in my dreams!—Oh! an’ I’ll see this bonnie bit whare I sat many a day in the warm sun; it may be brighter there—but it canna be so bonnie—an’ dinna put any one in it, for I’ll come back whiles to leuk at it—an’ I’ll see yoursel’ there, darlin’.” Her mind was wandering, and she went on for some minutes, muttering unintelligibly, while a deep silence reigned among all present. “See!” said she once more, shuddering violently, “see what yon villain’s about, my bairn!—my bonnie bairn, my darlin’ Moraig!—dinna heed him darling; dinna let him near you. Oh! will no one stop them? I canna stir!—Oh, Mr. Tresham, stop them; they’ll be off wi’ her, and ye’ll never see her more!”

Painful as it was to witness the ramblings of

a mind which, now like an expiring taper, wavered in the socket, not one of the party thought of withdrawing. But they were not long detained, for the scene was drawing to a close. After a pause of several minutes, during which Isabelle held the poor dying creature in her arms, her glazing eyes seemed once more to lighten with intelligence;—one might have imagined them to be animated by that vision which had so long deserted them.

“ Blessings! blessings on the Lord for his goodness, in granting me to see this day! But oh—I canna get breath—gie me air—gie me air!” and Isabelle endeavoured to relieve her, by unfastening her head-clothes. “ Aye, darling—leuk at it, it’s the face o’ Elsie Mac Leod; but it’s sore, sore changed, an’ the winding sheet’s about her—high—high at the throat—it ’ll be ow’r her head sune. Whare are ye, darling?”

“ Here, dear Elsie—here,”—and she tried to raise her up, to relieve the heavy gaspings of her flagging breath.

“ Oh, it’s could—could—I canna feel—I canna hear.—Blessings, dear child! Oh Lord! pardon my sins an’ receive me!” The last spark of expiring nature was gone. The eye became glazed again, and Isabelle felt the emaciated body of her old nurse sink, utterly powerless in her arms; the spirit—the kindly spirit, had fled for ever!

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

A fair good night !

ERE another day had elapsed, copies of Pater-son's examination, properly attested, were sent to Mr. Oswald, in Edinburgh, the man himself being kept in strict confinement. But the next morning's post brought a letter from that gentleman, containing the information that the laird of Ballytully had fled, it was supposed to Holland, taking with him what cash he could lay his hands on. That the uncle was open-mouthed against him, denouncing him as a degenerate and unworthy branch of the Macaskill stock ; but that with regard to the Airdruthmore settlement, there had as yet been no overture of a pacific nature.

A few days subsequent to this, the following letter was received from the same gentleman, addressed to Glenvallich, who had hitherto con-

ducted the correspondence on the part of Airdruthmore.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I believe our process has come to a close, and in a manner not very much to be wondered at, although not altogether expected by me. Adopting your suggestion, and coinciding in your opinion that public exposure was, if possible, to be avoided, I wrote some days ago to Mr. Thomas Macaskill, advising him of the progress I had made in examining the state of his intromission with the Airdruthmore property, *ab initio*, shortly enumerating the proofs I had discovered of false sales and charges, and general malversation. To this I appended a summary of the evidence in our possession, of his connexion with his nephew in many transactions of an illicit nature, confirmed by the oath of one of the gang, who had turned king's evidence. In reply I received a hurried note, demanding two days for consideration and examining documents, before giving in his final answer, and contenting himself for the time with a general denial of the facts alleged against him.

“ On the morning of the second day a rumour reached me that Macaskill had absconded, and upon examination I found it to be correct. He had followed the example of his nephew in carrying off whatever ready money he could obtain, and has left his affairs in extreme confusion. The

creditors are making every exertion to overtake and bring him back, but I doubt their success, nor have I taken any steps in the matter. So far, indeed, am I from conceiving this catastrophe from being prejudicial to the interests of Airdruthmore, that I conceive it will facilitate a settlement of accounts, inasmuch as it is easier to deal with a trust composed of honest men than with a rogue.

“ I have already established beyond contradiction that the wadsett is still redeemable; that many of the bonds are fictitious; and that when a true state of accounts shall have been made up, giving due credit for produce sold, payments made to account, balance on under-stated rents, interest, &c. &c. the Airdruthmore property will owe little, if any thing, to Macaskill’s estate, and that its owner will find himself in possession of a clear income of between four and five thousand pounds a year.

“ I have already communicated with some of the principal creditors on these subjects, and find them very reasonable. When any thing final is arranged, you shall hear from me; but I anticipate very little in addition to or variation from the statement I have now given you.

“ I remain, my dear sir,

“ Your faithful obedient servant,

“ J. OSWALD.”

Gentle reader! need we proceed further? need

we expend your time and patience in propounding how that the anticipations of the worthy writer were justified to the full by the event, and that happiness, peace, and plenty, shed their influence once more over the house of Airdruthmore? Need we tell how the good old laird, bewildered by the rapid and astounding succession of events which had begun and completed this happy revolution in his affairs, wept like a child between joy and gratitude, as he blessed the staunch friends who had lent him their timely aid to rescue him from the fangs of so insatiable a bloodsucker as the specious and sagacious Tom Macaskill? How his delight was yet increased when, with a face glowing with smiles yet wet with tears, he bestowed the treasure of his daughter's hand, where that richer treasure, her heart, had been long before disposed—upon one, too, who from their earliest introduction, had been his favourite and his friend? How that the good old man, restored to that ease which was his proper element, lived to a venerable age in the exercise of that hospitality in which his soul delighted; cheered by the frequent company of the daughter whom he loved, not less for being surrounded by a group of red-cheeked, curly-headed little urchins; and who, though in possession of an ample fortune, and every luxury of rich and prosperous England, still hailed with joy—a joy participated by her excellent husband—every occasion which brought them back to their

favourite Highlands, and to that Airdruthmore, the cherished scene of their first acquaintance and earliest felicity? Tresham loved the Highlands—loved them for themselves, but more for the blessings, the fond affection, and true devoted friendship which he had found there; and even now that the day of romance and enthusiasm has somewhat past its prime, his mind still dwells with fond regard upon the scenes of so much happiness. Even yet, with scarce diminished ardour, does he sometimes chase the dun deer on the steep sides of Scoor-e-vialach, and over the lofty mountains of Glen Ochre; but never does he enter that wild glen—the scene of his first exploits—without a sigh, a tribute to departed worth and fidelity, for the form of Duncan Maccombich rises on his memory, and he sighs to think that the fleet foot, the stout arm, and the true heart of the bold forester are mouldering in the kirk-yard of Glen Orra!—Nor do we

“ Rhyme to that dull elf,
Who cannot figure to himself;”

that just about the same time when Tresham led his lovely bride to the altar, his friend Glenvallich—the true, the noble, and the generous—was blessed to the fulness of his own wishes by the hand and heart of the lively Maria Tresham, and that thus was established a union of interests and

families in that part of the country which forms the scene of our story, which were durable, because based on the firm principles of real worth and solid esteem.

We do not deem ourselves bound to dispose of all the minor personages of our little drama, but for the gratification of those who are unconscionably curious we shall state, that by dint of merit, backed by a sufficient force of interest, William Stewart was speedily made commander, and in due time was posted into a smart ship upon the Channel station, where he distinguished himself during the remainder of the war. When hostilities ceased, he retired to the Highlands, and at the demise of his father took possession of the family property and residence, where he fills his place with a prudence and steadiness that have gained him universal esteem, and promise to exempt him from all hazard of such misfortunes as those which so nearly ruined the old laird. The worthy Grizzie Macfarlane still continues to hold an ostensible place in his household; but we learn, that her duties have of late been confined to the exercise of her surgical talents, and that she still salves, poultices, and foment with her customary success. Her more laborious duties are now performed by a housekeeper of more modern date, who again discharges her functions under the guidance and control of a young and beautiful lady, lately selected by the new laird as partner of his heart and fortune, and who forms,

we are bound to declare, a fit and worthy successor to the late fair mistress of Airdruthmore.

Courteous reader!—courteous indeed, if with patience, forbearance, and charity, thou hast perused these pages,—the shades of evening fall on Airdruthmore!—Glen, strath, and mountain, lake and river, with all their shadowy people, recede from view into the mist of obscurity from which a rash and feeble hand has sought to withdraw them for awhile. The curtain drops upon our mimic scene—mimic only in name, and in some few features of its story—true and faithful, we venture to affirm, in all that may be deemed worthy of attention, so far as the pencil which has attempted to sketch its characters and scenery, is capable of the task. Many a valley may be found in the Scottish Highlands, sweet and peaceful as that of Strath Einort;—many a romantic and happy dwelling like Airdruthmore. The race of ancient Highland lairds is fast “wearin’ awa’;”—but there still exist some specimens of the kind and hospitable, though, alas! sometimes inconsiderate stock, which have served as prototypes of the good old laird. We rejoice to think that they are now in great degree replaced by such successors, as we have attempted to portray in the more prudent, more cultivated, and liberal-minded Glenvallich. That true and gallant hearts, with stout arms to aid them, are not yet scarce in the Highlands, will, we are sure, be admitted by all who know the country—and to

• such we may confidently appeal for the fidelity of our sketch of the brave and unfortunate forester.

But as

Every while maun hae its black
And every sweet its sour.

—so must every flock have its own worthless sheep, and every land its evil sons?—nor do we attempt to deny that *Macaskills*, *Kenneth Dhorrus*, and *Patersons*, may occasionally be found, even in the Highlands of Scotland. But though there may be something found to blame and to deprecate, we venture to assert that there is still more to admire and commend. Our northern hills teem with scenes of beauty and grandeur, as little known to the modern tourist as their legendary lore is to the literati of the age. It is a wide, a rich, and almost an untrodden field; and strange it would be if, in this age of universal and bold adventure, some were not found to seize its proffered treasures.

The southern portion of our land has called forth the voice of the mighty enchanter, to record the deeds of its sons, and to describe, in spell-like tones, its people, its history, and its scenery. The sister island, with characteristic fecundity, has given birth to a cloud of powerful and energetic artists, to paint the land that gave them birth. England—rich, happy, but less romantic England—teems with admirable painters of her elegant and fashionable manners. The Highlands, the

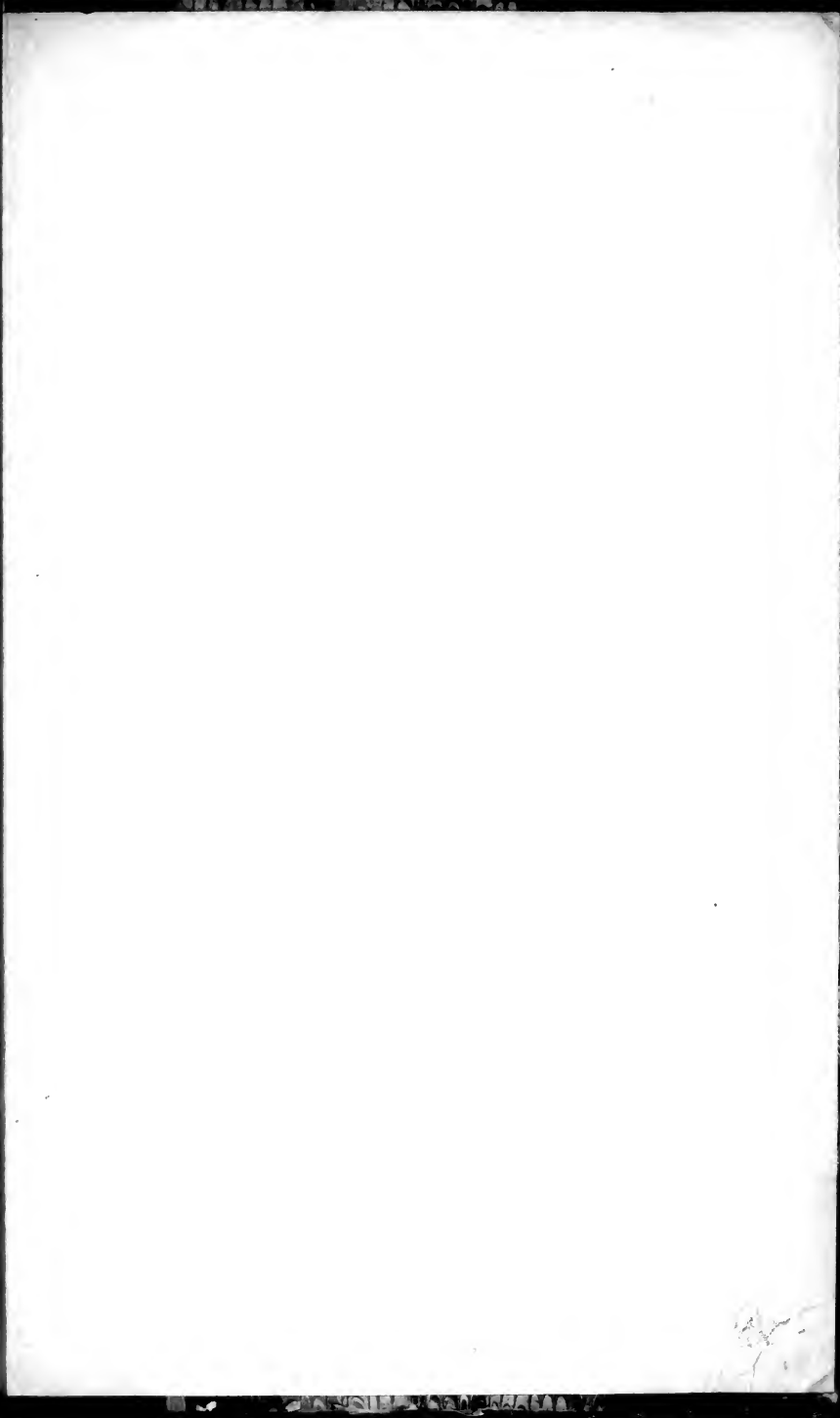
Highlands alone, have hitherto suffered comparative neglect; for of the numerous and admirable fictions of which the scene has been laid there, in whole or in part, how small a portion has been devoted to characteristic descriptions of genuine Highland scenery and manners! But it is a neglect which cannot long continue. Assuredly among the sons and daughters of genius, who issue from the romantic regions of the north, there will be found some who, with a pen of power and truth and feeling, will illustrate the wild beauties of their native land, and the simple and moral, but interesting manners of their countrymen.

THE END.

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